

# Moral Relativism and the Problem of Immersion

*Master thesis in Philosophy*

*Øyvind S Strøm*



*Supervisor: Sebastian Watzl*

*University of Oslo*

*IFIKK*

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**Summary:**

The purpose of this thesis is to have a closer look at moral relativism, and the problem of immersion. Most people will accept that the truth of judgements are relative to certain standards, a moral framework. Most people however, will not accept the fact that just because morality is relative to a person's moral framework, that we should accept and tolerate what they say and do. The fact that we can explain why someone does such and such, or has certain beliefs that clash with our moral convictions does not promote the idea that we should simply tolerate their views. This thesis then, will set out to flesh out some of the attributes of moral relativism, and have a closer look at them.

I will mainly concentrate on moral motivation in the form of internalism, and the problem of immersion which arises when we are faced with the problem of disagreement. In the first chapter we are simply introduced to the issues, and by the end of the first chapter we are in a position to say that both types of moral relativism which this thesis some problems regarding immersion which they must overcome. I suggest by having a deeper look at how they account for moral motivation, that we can find some solution to the problem of immersion. By the end of the second chapter, we learn that it is both the cognitivist features and the non-cognitivist features of a moral judgment which helps us account for morality in a convincing way. The third chapter then, will summarize and deal with the problem of immersion up close, with what we learn from the first and the second chapter about moral belief and moral motivation.

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# **Chapter 1:**

## **Moral Relativism**

### ***Introduction***

Moral relativism is the meta-ethical theory that there is no absolute moral code which governs us all. There is a myriad of different understandings and opinions on moral matters which all are equal to each other. In a way, Moral Relativism, is the acceptance that morality is a truly complex concept. In this paper I will deal with Moral Relativism as a descriptive theory, trying to illustrate how morality actually function in the actual world. It is interesting then, to see how the moral language behaves when two people can disagree over a matter, and both of them in a way would still be completely right. I will argue that overcoming the problem of immersion is one of the most important problems. Moral relativism needs to overcome to be a properly viable contender, and give a satisfactory account of how morality works.

Although often considered controversial or even radical, moral relativism has been discussed for a long time. Very vaguely we can explain Moral Relativism as the claim that there are different moral truths about the same question. In a massively globalized world where cultures meet, communicate and sometimes disagree over esthetic, etiquette and moral issues an understanding of Moral Relativism is needed. If we were to understand morality objectively (sometimes referred to as Moral Absolutism) we often argue that certain moral judgements are universal. Such as “Killing is wrong”, “You should not steal” etc. These are often considered to be endorsed by all groups of people in the civilized world, a cross-cultural rule, so to speak. There seems to be more to morality than this. The fact that there are numerous countries in the world that endorses capital punishment sometimes makes us change the general judgement “killing is wrong” into “killing is wrong, unless enforced by an official organ of the state”. The moral judgement often deemed universal “You should not steal” seems to wither when big corporations steal patents of other corporations, and improve

them in their products. This seems overlooked and not important in the big picture, as long as the final product is publicly accepted as a good or better product.<sup>1</sup>

One way of pinpointing what we could mean by Moral Relativism is that certain groups of people will judge a moral statement as right, while another group of people will not. The easiest way to see this in practice is by looking at cultural differences. Some smaller cultures endorse the practice of genital mutilation of women, while the rest of the world, mostly, frown upon this practice and calls it disgusting, barbaric and immoral. This illustrates a worthy point, but it does not rightly illustrate Moral Relativism. I want to stress that I am not arguing that we, as moral agents, should treat morality as relative in the way that one would make judgements. I am not arguing that we should tolerate everything another person, group of people or culture does just because we can explain morality as relative. What Moral Relativism should be, and in fact is, is a metaethical theory that will help us describe how morality works. One's own moral convictions is what makes morality possible at all, the fact that we can disagree about them to the level that we do is what makes Moral Relativism a good candidate to explaining how that actually happens.

Diversity seems to suggest that seeking a better understanding of moral relativism is worthwhile. Consider the fact that in Norway we still argue whether abortion is morally acceptable or not. It is a discussion that has gone on for decades, both sides of the discussion arguing based on empirical facts and arguments about what is a human right or not. The disagreement is deep, and it splits friends and family on the issue. As a group of people, as a neighbourhood, group of friends or family, we are not inclined to identify said group with our moral convictions. The *prima facie* disagreement that we so clearly can see being practiced on key issues is an indicator that right and wrong isn't always prone to universal understanding.

Now it is definitely worth explaining that the question of disagreement is a deep one within the discussions of Moral Relativism. It is worth some attention as it is one of the classic questions raised in metaethics, and The Philosophy of Language. The general idea that sparked one of the classic issues of disagreement in relation to Moral Relativism is that, if a

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<sup>1</sup> The way production of mobile devices is seemingly a sphere where stealing ideas is accepted.

person expresses the assertion that “It is wrong to D”, it can be said that what that person is in fact uttering is “According to my moral convictions, it is wrong to D”. If we interpret the former assertion as the latter we are not actually giving a moral judgement, but rather stating a fact. It is more along the lines like “Sara’s pants are blue”. This will be explicated when we take a deeper look into certain areas of Moral Relativism.

The discussions around morality in general belongs in several different spheres. Disagreement is part of one of these spheres, another is motivation. In his 1994 book “The Moral Problem” Michael Smith outlined the problems facing morality like this:

- Moral Judgements expresses objective facts about an agents beliefs of what is right for *her* to do.
- If someone expresses a moral judgement that it is right for that someone to  $\Phi$  then that someone is motivated to  $\Phi$ .
- An agent’s motivation depends on said agent’s desire to reach that goal, and that agents ability to achieve that goal.

Although a classical problem I will not only focus on the problem of disagreement, but rather in relation to the second statement concerning motivation. What these three have in common is however the fact that we’re dealing with moral judgements. “It is wrong of P to D” is an example of such a judgement. Critics of certain types of Moral Relativism argues that the negation of such a judgement is not actually expressing disagreement, but rather they are stating two different facts.<sup>2</sup> “It is wrong of P to D” and “it is not-wrong of P to D” is then interpreted as “According to my moral convictions it is wrong of P to D” and “According to my moral convictions it is not-wrong of P to D”, the latter set of sentences is thought to be equivalent to sentences such as “The sky is blue” and “The sky is not-blue”.

Moral convictions as I have called them here are often referred to as ‘moral frameworks’, I will be using both these expressions interchangeably. As Michael Smith in his “The Moral

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<sup>2</sup> I will discuss this at length during the paper, but most relevant for the theme of this paper is Max Kölbel (2004)



Problem” points out, one of the platitudes surrounding morality is that it should be practical.<sup>3</sup> What this in essence means is that a moral judgement should not just be a statement of fact, it should also have a motivating force. It is of my understanding that, if moral judgements have no motivating force, then arguing about whether they can express disagreement falls a bit to the side.

In my thesis I will first go through some of the general aspects of Moral Relativism. Most readers of philosophy are familiar with the concept, but it is important never the less that we are all on the same page when we are about to tackle a core issue about morality. In all it’s controversy Moral Relativism has founds itself rethought on many levels. And as Gilbert Harman puts it, it’s easy enough to take up a *dissuasive* line of arguments against Moral Relativism:

“They define moral relativism as an inconsistent thesis. For example, they define it as the assertion that (a) there are no universal principles of one’s own group, where this latter principle (b) *is* supposed to be a universal moral principle.”<sup>4</sup>

I agree with Harman that it is easy to assert that such a way of thinking is not consistent, but also that defenders of Moral Relativism should be able to find some better definition. I will introduce the reader to one of the defenders of Moral Relativism by looking at Gilbert Harman’s article “*Moral Relativism Defended*”<sup>5</sup> and his contribution to the book “*Moral Relativism and Moral Absolutism*”.<sup>6</sup> It was how I was initially introduced to Moral Relativism and I feel it works as a great introduction to the theme. Harman’s thinking has been greatly criticised by many thinkers, but it is still very much relevant reading. In the same line of reasoning, I will also go through James Dreier’s article “*Internalism and Speaker Relativism*”. It is closely related to Harman’s version of Moral Relativism and serves as a great introduction to internalism in the realm of moral motivation.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith (1994) p.p. 7

<sup>4</sup> Harman, Gilbert (1975) p.p 3

<sup>5</sup> Harman, Gilbert (1975)

<sup>6</sup> Harman, Gilbert in Gilbert, Harman & Thomson, Judith J. (1996)

It would not be a proper introduction to Moral Relativism unless we have a look at what some thinkers have called “Genuine Relativism” or “Alethic Relativism”<sup>7</sup>. Made famous by thinkers like MacFarlane and Kölbel, it serves as an alternate way of treating moral judgements compared to Harman and Dreier. Never the less, it is important to look at this realm of relativism as well, if we are to treat moral judgements as practical in the sense as motivating, or with the disposition to inspire motivation such a theory must in virtue be able to account for several versions of moral relativism. Following the general theme of this first part I will also go through some of the objections raised against Moral Relativism. The first chapter will also introduce the problem of immersion, what we know about moral relativism from the first chapter should suffice to be clear why the problem is a real one.

The second chapter I will dedicate to moral motivation. It serves one of the core elements in the discussion regarding morality, and I will mainly focus this chapter on having moral relativism account for internalism. It also becomes clear why immersion is a problem which exists within the realm of moral motivation as well, as we tackle a problem posed by Michael Smith.

In the third, and final chapter we revisit the problem posed by the end of the first chapter. If moral relativism could account for the problem of immersion, we would be able to assert that moral relativism can successfully account for genuine disagreement and moral motivation. Given the different types of moral relativism, I would say that they have two ways of going about to account for immersion-- by the traditional contextualists route, or by the genuine relativists. Hopefully, by the end we will have some insight into a moral aspect which accepts the diversity in the world.

## **1.1 - Moral Relativism in general**

If explained crudely moral relativism would be something like this: *The truth-value of a moral judgement is relative to some moral standard*. Although this sentence is very crude in it's nature, it can be used to explain some phenomena. Moral standard in this sense can be a cultural tradition or based on a society's willingness to accept certain actions etc. It can also

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<sup>7</sup> Kölbel, Max (2004), López de Sa, Dan (2007)

be used to explain how morality in certain places has changed over time. For instance, the sentence 'it is morally acceptable to hold slaves' is a true sentence if we were in 1800's Mississippi. If the sentence is uttered today it would not be true. In the same way this way of explaining moral relativism also explains cultural differences in contemporary times. The sentence 'it is morally wrong to circumcise(genitally mutilate) women' is a true judgement in most parts of the modern world, but it's not true in a few African tribes. What this means, and what moral relativists argue, is that there are no absolute moral truths that govern everyone. This is a rather radical claim, because when we say that there are no absolute moral truths we are inclined to argue that 'everybody agrees that' *killing is wrong*, or *it is wrong to steal* etc.

An important question is of course, what is morality? My personal opinion, and I believe there are a lot of moral philosophers out there who agree with me, is that morality is something that motivates us to act according to some conviction. This conviction then is what we could call the "moral framework". However, what is interesting right now is the concept of relativity in utterances, and how this could be implemented into morality. To start off we will examine one of the more infamous relativists, Gilbert Harman.

## **1.2 Harman's idea of Moral Relativism**

Gilbert Harman wrote an article in 1975 called "Moral Relativism Defended" where he outlined a rather interesting type of take on moral relativism. What he calls a 'soberly logical thesis' is supposed to work as an explanation of why in certain genres of utterances, the truth value of a moral judgement will always be relative to some standard. The genre in question Harman calls 'inner judgements' of the form "A ought not to D". The magic word in this sense is *ought* or *should*. These words have more or less the same meaning, and according to Harman they are indexicals. They will not explain anything unless they have some form of context. Harman implies that the nature of *ought* or *should* brings out a logically sound relativism, as we shall see why.

If Paul says that "Aaron should not make fun of the homeless guy", according to Harman, Paul is making the assumption that Aaron is going to agree with this statement: It is wrong of people to make fun of homeless people. On the other hand, in the obscene example, if Bryan

utters that “Aaron should make fun of the homeless guy” the statement is negated as: It is not-wrong of people to make fun of homeless people. Whether or not the statement is true is based on whoever utters the sentence. The reason is that inner judgements are fundamentally different from ‘normal’ moral judgements like “Hitler is evil”, “Sarah is mean” or “Goodwyn is righteous”. These sentences all explain something about someone's moral sentiment, but they are merely statements about facts. They are not what Harman wants us to consider. To explain what Harman wants us to explicate, consider the following:

“We make inner judgements about a person only if we suppose that he is capable of being motivated by the relevant moral considerations.”<sup>8</sup>

When Paul claims that Aaron ought not to do *something*, what he is actually doing is making a statement of which Paul believes Aaron would agree to. According to Harman it makes no sense to utter a sentence of the form “A ought not to D” if the speaker does not believe it would motivate the listener. If we told the Terminator not to kill Sarah Connor, The Terminator would not react. It would not have any meaning to the Terminator to make such a statement.<sup>9</sup>

Now there is reason to reflect upon the fact that the indexicals ‘should’ and ‘ought’ does promote relative truth values in other circumstances, than in morality. If I tell a person who is asking for directions to the closest hotel and I claim “You should go down the road and take a left”. There would be no meaning to this sentence unless I believed that my utterance would promote his goal to find the hotel. We could differentiate between sentences like these, and the ones above as *normative* and *motivational*. The latter type of sentences is *normative* because they say something about how to reach a goal, that goal being relative to the speaker and listener based on the context. The motivational type as the examples with Aaron, Paul and Bryan, suggests a conviction to act according to some moral belief.

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<sup>8</sup> Harman 1975 p.p 4

<sup>9</sup> This is a pop-culture reference to the movie Terminator with Arnold Schwarzenegger from 1984, in case there is any confusion.

In his contribution alongside Judith Jarvis Thomson in “Moral Relativism and Moral Absolutism” in 1996 Gilbert Harman puts forth a more refined version of his Moral Relativism which as an overall theory of moral relativism explains morality in a more general sense. Inner judgements are not always how we speak in moral terms. His contribution directed towards a more common practical use of moral language.

Consider the following:

(I): “For the purposes of assigning truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *it would be morally wrong of P to D*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to moral framework M, it would be morally wrong of P to D*. Similarly for other moral judgments.”<sup>10</sup>

This definition of morality is loosely based on a comparison between moral judgements and judgements about mass:

(II): “For the purposes of assigning truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *the mass of X is M*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to spatio-temporal framework F the mass of X is M*.”<sup>11</sup>

Like the instances of using “should” or “ought” in a moral judgement, Harman consider sentences of the form “*It would be morally wrong of P to D*” as inner judgements. What is interesting though in the last two quotes above from Harman’s contribution to the work “Moral Relativism and Moral Absolutism” is that he considers moral judgements to be relative in the same sense as judgements about mass. This has been criticized as we shall see in section 1.5 by thinkers like Paul Boghossian<sup>12</sup>. Now one of the central claims in Harman’s theory is that when the speaker utters a moral judgement, of the form Harman considers an inner judgement, he as mentioned expects the listener to agree with the judgement. What then is the case when the speaker and the listener obviously does not agree?

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<sup>10</sup> Harman & Thomson 1996 p.p 4

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Paul Boghossian 2011 ‘Three Kinds of Relativity’ p.p 54

When two people, let's call them John and Sarah, disagree without sharing the same moral convictions we have a different situation.

(a) John thinks that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was revolting actions.

(b) Sarah feels that the atomic bombings was acceptable as it ended a long war.

Now let's assume that both John and Sarah are presented with the exact same facts, and both John and Sarah are reasonable people willing to discuss the matter at hand. We can paraphrase the above example as this:

(a\*) It was morally wrong of U to B.

(b\*) It was morally not-wrong of U to B.<sup>13</sup>

Now again, assuming that both John and Sarah are reasonable people, with the exact same facts about the matter, they still disagree about the matter at hand. It is a scenario that doesn't sound far fetched at all to most people. I believe it's safe to consider a great amount of moral discussions that are thrown around between people in open discussions, on social media etc. where people do not have the exact amount of information, or people being completely reasonable. But for sake of argument, let's assume that in this case they are. John and Sarah are seemingly disagreeing about a moral matter, how do they talk about this?

According to Harman it makes no sense for John and Sarah to make inner judgements about each other since such sentences will not have the potential to motivate. It would make no sense to tell The Terminator that he *should not* murder Sarah Connor. It is a far-off example, so let's introduce one of Harman's more famous examples to illustrate this point. The contented employee of Murder Inc. is a person with a mafia-like mindset. His only real conviction is to please his 'family', and other people are only potentially in the way of this goal. According to Harman it makes no sense to tell this person that he 'should not kill' the banker Mr. Orcutt, as he is ordered to perform this task.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sometimes I will use "not-wrong" instead of "right" in examples. This is because when using examples I am not trying to create characters that sometimes endorse horrible actions, but rather characters who find them acceptable.

<sup>14</sup> This example is found in his 1975 article "Moral Relativism Defended"

This all goes back to Harman's proposal that inner judgements are ones that potentially inspire or motivate the listener to what the speaker is saying. When this is not the case, which is quite often, we need to treat the moral judgements differently. Harman proposes a *quasi-absolutist* approach to this problem. At first then, because of events such as the Terminator example and the contented employee of Murder Inc moral relativism seems to have some problems accounting for cases where there is genuine disagreement between people. As mentioned in the introduction, a moral relativist theory should be able to account for disagreement in a convincing way (which lets us stay immersed), and account for the appropriate motivation which would follow from having a moral belief.

### 1.3 James Dreier's Speaker Relativism

As a theory James Dreier's Speaker Relativism is closely related to Harman's idea. In his article *Internalism and Speaker Relativism*, Dreier, James (1990). Dreier outlines a connection between the motivational aspect of internalism and relativism. His goal of the paper is to explain internalism by asserting a form of relativism which he calls 'Speaker Relativism'. Considering Harman's definition (II), we ought to see that Dreier's is more or less based on the same train of thought: "The Content of a moral term itself depends on the most salient moral system in the context of use."<sup>15</sup>

An important part of both Dreier's and Harman's theories is that we are always speaking of some moral system, framework, or convictions. Long overdue it's time we took a closer look at what a moral system is. One way of describing it is as *the sum of a person's or group's moral convictions*.

"On my proposed analysis, sentences containing moral terms straightforwardly express propositions - though which propositions they express will vary with the context. So I can simply say that such sentences embed into the relevant context just as any other indexical sentences do"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dreier, James 1990 p.p 6

<sup>16</sup> Dreier, James 1990 p.p 15

James Dreier's theory as mentioned is similar to Gilbert Harman's, though his approach is different. He proposes a two-level semantics for moral terms, very much like Harman:

- (1) a moral term has a content; which the utterance of said content expresses something depending on the occasion.
- (2) a moral term's semantic value captures part of the utterer's motivation.

Relying on David Kaplan, Dreier wants us to consider that indexicals have a certain character. When we use the term "x is good" the indexical's asserted content will vary based on the speaker's moral framework. The character 'good' on the other hand will be the same. Understanding the character of good is the same as understanding the extent of the word and it helps the moral framework assert it's belief.

Aaron claims that "chocolate is good" is somewhat different from Aaron's claim that "charity is morally good". Both of these expresses Aaron's attitude towards something. Dreier suggests that the moral claim expresses something about Aaron's motivational attitudes towards charity. Even though judgments about chocolate and charity is two vastly different types of judgements, the 'character' of the term 'good' is the same. Having and understanding of *such* a character is important to be able to make moral judgements.

But now, let's get back to Dreier's intentions with his speaker relativism, namely that of being able to explain internalism. What let us have a brief look at that:

The general idea of internalism is that moral terms have an intrinsic nature of motivation:

"If an agent judges that it is right to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, then she is motivated to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C." (Smith 1994)

This is what would be called a strong definition of internalism. This definition is flawed because it does not explain how some cases, it would not apply such as for people who suffers from depression or other afflictions to the mind or will. I will get back to discussing internalism in the second chapter, but for now it will suffice.



Both Harman and Dreier proposes that moral judgements have an intrinsic link to motivation, in other words what Dreier claims; that speaker relativism explains internalism is a very strong argument for relativism's motivational dependence. I will get back to internalism, and James Dreier in chapter two where I will deal with internalism at length.

## **1.4 Genuine Relativism**

On the face of it there seems to be minor difficulties between the two types of relativism as such. Of course the main element will persist: relativity. I will outline the general theme which Max Kölbel sets forth to illustrate the distinguishment between Genuine Relativism and Contextualism<sup>17</sup>. I will then delve deeper into genuine relativism and have a look at MacFarlane's theory, which is often thought as of the more successful of the genuinists. The difference in relativity is what interests us here, and how that might impact motivation in the world of moral relativism.

Let's explicate what we have said so far about genuine relativism with an example to pick out the main difference between the contextualists and the genuinists. Consider the sentence "Abortion is wrong". Thinkers A and B disagree on this matter and Kölbel regards this from the contextualist perspective as them expressing different propositional content depending on the context (which in this case is their respective moral framework):

A: According to my moral framework abortion is wrong.

B: According to my moral framework abortion is not-wrong.

This is somewhat along the lines of how Kölbel pictures the propositional content changing depending on the context. Crudely explained Kölbel claims that the contextualists are guilty of something he calls 'distortion of topic'<sup>18</sup>. In other words, because of contextualisms reliance on the context to make out the content, what A and B are actually talking about is not

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<sup>17</sup> I will for simplicity's sake refer to Dreier and Harman's theories as contextualism, even though Kölbel makes the distinction between indexical and non-indexical contextualism. I will make this explicit where it needs to be.

<sup>18</sup> Kölbel 2004 "Indexical Relativism vs Genuine Relativism"

whether or not abortion is morally acceptable-- but rather they are expressing some fact about their moral framework. Let's take a closer look to what is the case here.

It's normal to assume that the assertions made by A and B are not explicit of the form "According to my framework  $p$ ". What A and B actually utters is of the form:

A<sup>1</sup>: "Abortion is wrong" and,

B<sup>1</sup>: "Abortion is not-wrong".

The trouble begins as Kölbel points out that A and B's expressed propositions  $p$  and  $\sim p$  is *propositionally equivalent* to the explicit forms just mentioned above. This is somewhat of a direct consequence of the contextualists idea of moral sentences acting like indexical sentences. Now in transition to what exactly Genuine Relativism is, it is worth making note of a distinction Kölbel illuminates when discussing contextualism:<sup>19</sup>

A and B's explicit utterances can be understood in both Strawsonian and Russellian *fashions*. What this in turn means is that when a proposition like A and B is uttered: "According to my moral framework  $p$ " in the Strawsonian sense, this sentence is true iff there is such a framework to begin with. If there is no such framework the utterance would not even succeed in expressing a proposition. In the Russellian sense, the utterance also asserts the existence of such a framework which is then referred to.

In light of this it is time to explore Kölbel's explanation of Genuine Relativism. One of the main concepts that sparks genuine relativism is what is called faultless disagreement. Max Kölbel in his article "Genuine Relativism versus Indexical Relativism" attacks Harman and Dreiers form of relativism. Genuine Relativism is supposed to apply to all types of relativism, such as aesthetics or justification, but for the theme of this paper we will do as Kölbel and stick to Moral Relativism.

"A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker A, and a thinker B and a proposition (content of judgement)  $p$ , such that:

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<sup>19</sup> Kölbel 2004

- (a) A believes (judges) that *p* and B believes (judges) that not-*p*.
- (b) Neither A nor B has made a mistake (is at fault).”<sup>20</sup>

Faultless Disagreement per se makes sense in a lot of circumstances, which are easily imaginable. Such as when it comes to matters of taste. Most people can imagine and accept the fact that some people do not find pasta tasty, while others does. It might however be a bit harder to accept in the case of morality.

As mentioned above, contextualism place the element of relativity in a moral judgment’s context to a moral framework. Genuine Relativists claims that the content expressed changes independently from this context. Consider Kaplan’s two stages of semantics: “first, the content expressed depends on the context of use, and then the truth value of *that* content depends on the way the world is.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly contextualism places the relativity in the first of these two stages, but the genuinists place it in the second. In a way we can say that the truth-value is determined by a certain set of parameters after the context of use is determined. Kölbel calls this parameter a *perspective*.

Back in section 1.3 we had a look at James Dreier’s Speaker Relativism, which was closely related to Harman’s theory. Dreier took use of a Kaplanian expression, namely ‘character’. Dreier used this to explain how some words, such as ‘good’ would mean the same thing in all instances-- even cross-language-wise. Kölbel takes use of this ‘character’ in a similar way as the expressed content stays the same, but it’s relative truth-value changes. At this point we should be closer to have a better distinction between Genuine Relativism and Contextualism, and it is about time to take a closer look at, a perhaps more successful explanation of Genuine Relativism, John Macfarlane’s Non-indexical Contextualism. Even though not to be confused with what I have earlier labeled as Contextualism, I have chosen to place MacFarlane’s theory with the genuinists to illustrate it’s distinction from ‘traditional Contextualism’.

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<sup>20</sup> Kölbel 2003 p.p 53-54

<sup>21</sup> Kölbel 2004 p.p 306

MacFarlane introduces the term indexicality early in his 2009 paper as ‘dependence of *content* on features of context’. He uses the term *context sensitivity* to explain how truth-value features on context, but will argue that a non-indexical version of contextualism will have an advantage over traditional contextualism (like Harman and Dreier).

“[...] we should understand context sensitivity more broadly, as dependence of *extension* on context. It is possible for an expression to be semantically context-sensitive, in this sense, even if it has the same content at every context of use” (MacFarlane 2009)

MacFarlane introduces what he considers a very important distinction, which is the two stages of Kaplan’s semantics with the intention to disjoin these:

(1) An expression is *indexical* iff its *content* at a context depends on features of the context.

(2) An expression is *context-sensitive* iff its *extension* at a context depends on features of the context.

MacFarlane seems to put *extension* and *truth-value* more or less in the same boat. If this is correct, what MacFarlane wants to do with this is to separate (1) and (2), for which Max Kölbel was somewhat criticised for conjoining by Dan Lopez de Sa (2007)

MacFarlane argues that an expression can hold features of context-sensitivity, without holding features of indexicality. In other words, just as (1) does not entail (2), the converse also does not involve any entailment. This is the prerequisite for non-indexical contextualism.

Imagine if you will a familiar example for many; “Fish tastes good”. For many people it’s a statement which isn’t always the case to be true at all times. Some people don’t like fish when their children, but grows to like it with time. When I was 11 the sentence “Fish tastes good” would have expressed a false proposition, but more than 10 years later I can agree. However when people around me utter the sentence: “Fish does not taste good”, I don’t actually disagree with them. The proposition expressed by them applied to me at one point too, it’s more like it’s an incompatible view to my view. Whether or not the sentence “Fish is

good” is true or not depends on what time of my life I am asked. The Genuinists then, views the content to be the same in all contexts, but the truth-value of said proposition will vary with some parameter (in Kölbel’s case he calls it a perspective). The importance of MacFarlane’s disjunction between Kaplan’s first and second stage (as mentioned earlier) helps us illustrate how faultless disagreement can be possible. It remains to see still if we can successfully apply it to morality, as some view moral sentences as something special, and it can sometimes be thought of as faulty to familiarize morality with something as trivial as matters of taste.

Now to recap from earlier, one of the main points of Genuine Relativism is to avoid that sentences, such as moral sentences like A<sup>1</sup>: “abortion is wrong” in it’s *implicit* form end up like A: “according to my moral framework abortion is wrong” in it’s *explicit* form. Kölbel explains the difference between Indexical Contextualism and Genuine Relativism as the former being dependent on Kaplan’s first stage (1), and the latter relying on the second stage (2). MacFarlane’s Non-Indexical Contextualism is related to genuine relativism as far as content preservation goes, but differs in some ways:

A<sup>1</sup>: “Abortion is wrong”

This sentence is interpreted in three ways so far as we have come in our investigation of moral relativism. Harman and Dreier’s Indexical Contextualism will claim that the propositional content expressed by A<sup>1</sup> will vary depending on who utters it, and their respective framework, resulting in propositional equivalence with the explicit forms of the sentence (A). And as Kölbel points out this view is vulnerable to *distortion of topic*<sup>22</sup>. Kölbel’s answer to this is by sticking to the content. The sentence “Abortion is wrong” will always express the proposition ‘abortion is wrong’ in it’s implicit sense. In Kölbel’s view the sentence will express the same content, even if the context is changed. Kölbel’s view allows for faultless disagreement, but how does MacFarlane’s Non-Indexical Contextualism differ from Kölbel’s theory when faced with the same moral question?

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<sup>22</sup> As mentioned the fact that two people expressing their moral beliefs are talking about the context (their moral framework) instead of the content (their actual moral beliefs).

Da Lopez de Sa labeled Kölbel's theory 'Radical Relativism' to emphasize its distinction to MacFarlane's Non-Indexical Contextualism. MacFarlane draws the parallel between his train of thought, and the distinction between *eternalists* and *temporalists*<sup>23</sup>:

"On the eternalist view, the sentence [socrates is sitting] varies in truth value across times because it expresses different propositions at different times, and these propositions have different (eternal) truth values. On the temporalist's view, the sentence [socrates is sitting] varies in truth value across times because the (single) proposition the sentence expresses at all these times have different truth values relative to different times of evaluation. [...]. Both agree that such sentences are time-context-sensitive. But where the eternalist takes the time of the context to play a content-determinative role, the temporalist takes it to play a circumstance-determinative role. Thus, the eternalist, but not the temporalist, takes tensed sentences to be time-indexical. The temporalist's position, according to which tensed sentences are time-context-sensitive but not time-indexical, is an example of *nonindexical contextualism*." (MacFarlane 2009, p.p 234 -- brackets added by me)

When faced with the same utterance A<sup>1</sup>: "Abortion is wrong", the non-indexical contextualists will recognize that the content expressed by said sentence will always be the same, but the context of who, when and where the sentence is uttered will determine its truth-value. In this way it is similar to Kölbel's theory, and different from the Traditional Contextualism asserted by Harman and Dreier. The disjunction between Kaplan's two stages however, does ensure that a three-place predicate is sufficient (Context, content and *parameter*). This was the main line of critique towards Kölbel by Dan Lopez de Sa (2007)<sup>24</sup>, non-indexical contextualism then does not fall into the distortion of topic, and at the same time is able to sufficiently account for the relativity in moral judgments.

## 1.5 Objections

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<sup>23</sup> Temporalism is the view that propositions can vary with time, while eternalism is the view that propositions retain their true values eternally.

<sup>24</sup> Lopez de Sa 2007, p.p 271

### Morality and mass

An obvious objection towards thinkers like Harman who compares moral relativism to relativism about mass (or similar judgements)<sup>25</sup>, is the asymmetry of what we want to mean by moral judgments as opposed to that of judgments about mass. The bulk of the objection attacks the line of reasoning important to Harman's view, namely the implicitness of moral judgements. The idea is that if applied to physics we are stuck with a completely different type of judgement. In his paper "Three kinds of Relativism" Paul Boghossian raises some concerns to theories like Harman's. Consider the following two sets of sentences<sup>26</sup>:

(P<sub>1</sub>) "e1 is simultaneous with e2"

(P<sub>2</sub>) "e1 is simultaneous with e2 relative to salient frame of reference F"

(M<sub>1</sub>) "It is morally wrong of P to D"

(M<sub>2</sub>) "It is morally wrong of P to D according to a certain moral framework M"

The concern towards the comparison between physics and morality is due to the fact that the explicit and implicit forms of the sentences does not mean the same thing in the different types of sentences. As we already know from Kölbel's concern about the distortion of topic in cases of M<sub>2</sub> and M<sub>1</sub>. But this is not what we are mainly concerned about here either. The biggest difference is that in cases like P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub>, it makes perfect sense to state a fact in the explicit sense. It is actually what we want to express with the implicit form. In the case of morality, it's the other way around. It is this asymmetry which concerns Boghossian, and that if we are to follow the fact that if we utter P<sub>1</sub>, we actually want to mean P<sub>2</sub>. In the case of morality, we want to utter M<sub>1</sub>, but we don't want it to mean M<sub>2</sub>, because then we fall into the trap of distortion of topic.

The most natural response to this is of course that the comparison between moral judgements and judgements of e.g mass and locomotion is merely suggestive towards the fact that there need be a two-place predicate. But never the less, this example by Boghossian backs up the

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<sup>25</sup> Harman&Thomson 1996 chp 1.1

<sup>26</sup> Boghossian (2011) p.p 53

main problem which Indexical Contextualism faces, namely that of distortion of topic. A comparison between the sets of sentence P and M just adds fuel to the fire at this point.

### Distortion of topic

Even as we have seen over and over as a steady argument against the traditional contextualists like Harman and Dreier, the argument of distortion of topic can also be answered. Let me repeat the definition given by Harman in section 1.2:

(II): For the purposes of assigning truth conditions, a judgment of the form, *it would be morally wrong of P to D*, has to be understood as elliptical for a judgment of the form, *in relation to moral framework M, it would be morally wrong of P to D*.

Kölbel in his article “How to Spell Out Genuine Relativism and Defend Indexical Relativism” (2007) proposes a solution. His solution is to discard the semantic interpretation of Harman, where we utter one thing(implicitly), but mean another(explicitly)-- to the more pragmatic interpretation of presupposing moral frameworks. In the third chapter we are going to have a closer look at how this pragmatic interpretation might look like, with respects to immersive features and Kölbel’s illumination of the solution. This does seem to shed better light on what Harman meant by his definitions, however the whole term *understood as elliptical* is elusive and hard to understand. It does make his explanation of relativism a bit unclear. Even so we are faced with this interpretation a more reasonable way of viewing moral judgements, as I believe we can safely assume that people would assert the implicit version of a moral judgement, over the explicit version-- unless they specifically want to make a statement of fact about their moral convictions. It is unclear to me how well this interpretation of Harman can withstand the argument of distortion of topic, but it is never the less the suggestion of man who raised the question in the first place.

### The problem of disagreement



I take it that the fact that we are seemingly disagreeing about morality, and that we are able to give good explanations of why we disagree as evidence for moral relativism<sup>27</sup>. Even so there has been a good amount of discussions whether or not we are actually disagreeing when we are expressing our moral judgements.

In the case of ‘distortion of topic’ as just mentioned above the evidence of non-disagreement seems obvious. If we are stating facts about our moral frameworks, we are not actually disagreeing about our opinions, so to speak-- as mentioned earlier as well.

The question still remains whether or not the genuinists promise of content preservation will allow us to maintain that genuine disagreement. The term genuine disagreement can be an elusive one, but as the ‘distortion of topic’ argument helps us understand that we want to stick to moral judgments rather than statements of fact, we are looking for something beyond just having a proposition and it’s negation being incompatible with each other.

“It looks like an appealing way to formulate a relativist view of morality because it promises simultaneously to preserve genuine moral judgement and, hence, genuine moral disagreement, while acknowledging that there are no absolute moral facts.” (Paul Boghossian 2011 p.p. 60)

The question of faultless disagreement is of course important here. What we can assume is that if genuine relativism is consistent, then faultless disagreement will also be a very good argument for sticking to such a theory if we would like to promote moral relativism. Boghossian labels Genuine Relativism as ‘Alethic Relativism’, or relativism about truth-- which as far as we know about how thinkers like Kölbel and MacFarlane places the element of relativity is a fair label to give them. But Faultless Disagreement does not come without concerns, Boghossian points out with reference to Mark Richard<sup>28</sup>, The Argument from (Perspectival) Immersion(API)<sup>29</sup>:

(1) The Content (p) is at best relatively true (Alethic Relativism)

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<sup>27</sup> See introduction and chapter 1.1

<sup>28</sup> Mark Richard - *When Truth Gives Out* (2008)

<sup>29</sup> Boghossian 2011 p.p 62

- (2) If D judges validly that  $p$ , it will also be valid for D to judge that *it's true that  $p$* .  
(Truth is Disquotational within a perspective)
- (3) If D judges that *It's true that  $p$*  then D must, on pain of incoherence, judge that *It's false that not- $p$* .
- (4) If D judges that *It's false that not- $p$* , then D must, on the pain of incoherence, judge that anyone who judges *not- $p$*  is making a mistake.

Therefore,

- (5) D must judge that N is making a mistake (if N judges that *not- $p$* ) and so cannot regard the disagreement with N as faultless.

Therefore,

- (6) The disagreement between D and N is not faultless.

The argument is very convincing. After all, if we have a conviction which someone else does not share with us-- we should be inclined to believe that they have made a mistake somewhere in their reasoning, or else we should question our own. I think that this argument is very hard-hitting. I mentioned earlier in the introduction that I don't endorse for us as moral subjects to view morality as relativistic. If we did we would have to also endorse faultless disagreement, and I don't think that accepting faultless disagreement from a first person perspective is a plausible conclusion for anyone.

Gilbert Harman does however attempt to solve this problem, by adding to his original definition (I) (see section 1.2) a clause about *objective* truth conditions:

(III): For the purposes of assigning *objective* truth conditions, a judgement of the form *it would be morally wrong of  $P$  to  $D$* , has to be understood elliptical for a judgement of the form, *in relation to moral framework  $M$ , it would be morally wrong of  $P$  to  $D$* . Similarly for other moral judgements. (Harman 1996 p.p. 43)

The purpose of adding this clause is to show that when we disagree, we express our moral judgements as if they were objective truths. Even so they are in reality relative to a certain set of parameters. If this argument holds, then given the pragmatic interpretation of Harman's theory proposed by Kölbel, it might actually be the best contender to explain moral

disagreement for relativists, which actually is genuine disagreement. The other solution to this problem is to either restrict the principle of faultless disagreement, or reject (4) from the (API).

## 1.6 Overview

This chapter and its introduction has so far not tackled one of our main concerns. This first chapter tackles moral relativism in itself, and some of the difficulties it phases. In the introduction I presented some common thoughts and ideas about morality, and I asserted that I believe some of this is an illusion. It does not give proper credit to what morality actually is. I view Moral Relativism as a metaethical theory, which perhaps is the best suited to give an explanation of how morality works. I then introduced in Section 1.2 and 1.3 some aspects of a theory called Indexical Contextualism, with respects to Gilbert Harman and James Dreier. I established, successfully I hope, that the core feature of this theory is that it places the relativity with who ever utters the sentence. In other words, the content of an expressed sentence will vary with the context (who utters it, depending on their moral convictions). We then had a look at what some people have called Genuine Relativism, and we established the main difference between the two of these is that they place the element of relativity in different places. The main difference is that the genuinists propose the content to be preserved, even though different contexts will give us different parameters to say whether or not a the expressed proposition of a sentence is true or not. After section 1.4's look into an alternative form of relativism, we went through some objections and how one may respond to these in section 1.5.

We can argue that a lot of morality owes the outcome of what's right or wrong based on where and when in the world a moral judgement is uttered. For simplicity let's keep it to this actual world. There are many interesting views in morality born out of thought experiments of alternative worlds, but I do not wish to go into that at this point of time. Moral judgements are in one way different from other judgements in as they involve some form of conviction from the speaker. When Marta tells Robert that "It is morally wrong to have an abortion" it says something about her convictions. If on the other hand Marta tells Robert that "He should do his homework and be on time for lectures" it is a normative statement about how she

believes Robert should form his life around getting by school. We can argue that both of these sentences involve some form of motivation, but the moral judgement are more commonly accepted to be different from a normative judgement. In the next chapter we are going to have a look at the connection between having a belief, and being motivated to act accordingly.

The claim I am going to defend is that moral judgements in relativism depend on internalism, because of internalism's intrinsic nature of containing a motivational force. The natural starting point then is to try to break down James Dreier's claim that his speaker relativism explains internalism. From there on we are going to have a look at how different versions of internalist account, and put them to the test. If we were to be able to satisfactorily account for motivation, could we also have an account which helps us understand more of how to solve the problem of disagreement, and following that problem-- the problem of immersion which the (API) poses.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **Facing Moral Motivation**

### **2.1 - Internalism in General**

As mentioned in the introduction, the goal of this thesis is not to assess Moral Relativism in itself but in relation to moral motivation. In section 1.3 we had a brief look at James Dreier's 'Speaker Relativism', which as mentioned is very similar to the 'soberly logical thesis' by Gilbert Harman. Dreier claims that his speaker relativism will account for internalism-- this chapter will devote the first sections to introduce internalism in general, before going into closer looks of some examples in relation to the theories we investigated in chapter 1. First of all let me repeat the strong formulation of internalism, from section 1.3 and why it is too strong:

(SI) "If an agent judges that it is right to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, then she is motivated to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C."<sup>30</sup>

This formulation of internalism is as mentioned often called the 'strong argument/definition'. It is flawed because it as mentioned earlier can not account for cases where people suffer from psychological inflictions which can render an agent judging something to be good, or the right thing to do-- but still lacking the desire to pursue such a good thing. The other way around is also works as when a kleptomaniac/compulsive liar may judge an action to be bad, but still have that burning desire to pursue it. Smith then proposes a weaker formulation of internalism which can account for these:

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<sup>30</sup> Smith 1994 p.p 61

(PR) “If an agent judges that it is right to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C or she is practically irrational” (ibid.)

The connection between the strong formulation, and what Smith labeled the *practicality requirement* is quite clear however<sup>31</sup>: There is an intrinsic connection between an agent’s beliefs, and her being motivated to act accordingly. Let me clarify along with Dreier that motivation does not mean action-- it is one of the components which needs to be there for one to act upon their beliefs. Some have claimed for example that when a person judges something to be good, and then has a desire to attain said “goodness”, this person will be motivated to act accordingly. This is of course a very crude example of the internalist relation between having beliefs, and having motivation. For readers who are new to the concept, it should be enough of an explanation in section 2.1 to follow the rest of the chapter, as is the intention. Like most things I think Internalism is better illustrated by examples, and given what we examined in the first chapter of this paper, I believe it’s time to take a closer look on Internalism and how it relates to different theories in the realm of Moral Relativism.

Already there is a form of moral relativism which I have not yet given any space in this paper, namely Expressivism. It is vastly different because as it differs from the theories I have looked at so far in virtue of being non-cognitivist. What that in essence means is that an expressivist does not view moral judgements as *beliefs*. I want to focus on cognitivist theories in this paper, to follow the same theme, but as an introduction to internalism Expressivism is a great illustration of the intrinsic nature between moral judgements and motivation.

Instead of beliefs, expressivists maintains that their moral judgements expresses an attitude towards something. So, In essence when I judges something to morally good or bad, I simply express an attitude. It’s not uncommon to view expressivist judgements for good and bad as:

(G) ‘It is morally right to  $\Phi$ ’ will, according to expressivism express “ $\Phi$ -ing yay!”

(B) ‘It is morally wrong to  $\Phi$ ’ will, according to expressivism express “ $\Phi$ -ing boo!”

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<sup>31</sup> Smith 1994 p.p 62

This is the result of viewing moral judgements not as beliefs, but simply as expressing pro- and con- attitudes. As with anything there are some aspects which Expressivism can account for very well and there are some which Expressivism can not. To follow up from where we left off in 1.5, Expressivism does not suffer from any of the traditional pitfalls of disagreement. Even though it is not in the strictest sense moral relativism, as in it does not have traditional truth-aptness since their judgements does not express any propositions, we can maintain that Expressivism is in its extension relativist. Since in essence it only maintains that our moral judgements simply are expressions of pro- and con-attitudes towards what's 'good' it is very individualistic. It does not either suffer from the problems of 'distortion of topic', and the problem of 'perspectival immersion' is also not something this theory would topple over from. But the strongest side to this moral theory is that it is inherently internalistic, and explains internalism very well.

As opposed to when expressing beliefs, when moral judgements are expressing attitudes they are already expressing some 'pull' towards that what is being expressed. One way of viewing this way of thinking is that:

'Belief (+ desire)' leads to 'motivation', as distinguished from  
'Attitude' leads to 'motivation'

The idea that something is 'good' then, is enough to be motivated towards that 'goal'. However, Expressivism faces a lot of difficulties and a lot of criticism. Most famously what has been retained as a very successful argument against the expressivists is the classic 'Frege-Geach' problem which allows us to see the utility of being able to express truth-aptness.<sup>32</sup> There is no space to go into the 'Frege-Geach' problem here at length, mainly because I want to focus on cognitivist theories, and in short here is why:

“(P1) If tormenting the cat is bad, getting your little brother to do it is bad  
(P2) Tormenting the cat is bad.

*Ergo*, getting your little brother to torment the cat is bad.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Geach, 'Assertion', *Philosophical Review* 75 (1965)

<sup>33</sup> SEP: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-cognitivism/#EmbPro> 07.06.15

From (B) above we can infer that (P1) can be read as:

(B1): “If *boo!* ‘tormenting the cat’, then getting your little brother to *torment the cat* is *boo!*”

and, (B1) does not mean the same thing as

(B2): *boo!* tormenting the cat.

The Frege-Geach problem is often called the ‘embedding problem’ for this reason. When we supplement the proposition asserted in (P1) with the expressed attitude from (B1), we have trouble actually using the expressed attitudes in larger sentences such as: Negations, questions, etc.

In the introduction to this paper I referred to a taxonomy made by Michael Smith(1994)<sup>34</sup>. In short we are left pondering whether these three statements are true, as some have deemed them inconsistent or just plain simply false: (a) Moral judgements expresses propositions in the form of objective belief, (b) expressing a moral judgement is the same as expressing motivation to act accordingly, and (c) that having a belief (motivation) + desire → motivation. In the first chapter we showed that in order for relativist theories to fulfill (a) they need to overcome the argument of (perspectival) Immersion. In this section we will see if we can defend (b) which in essence is trying to see whether or not the relativist theories we have looked at so far can account for internalism. To successfully do so they must also do so while maintaining (a), and to help us we are going to see whether they can comply with Michael Smith’s claim about *justified* and *unjustified coercion* from his paper “Internalism’s Wheel” (1995).

## 2.2 Modest Internalism

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<sup>34</sup> This is essentially a way to view what the key features of meta ethics can be split into. I mentioned this in the introduction to the paper to illustrate where in the discussion this paper would take place, and I repeat that reference again here to exemplify this.



As James Dreier claims his moral theory will explain internalism, Michael Smith spinning his internalist wheel lands on the conclusion that it is not that simple. But first, let's get to know Dreier's Speaker Relativism a bit more than the short introduction in section 1.3 allowed us to.

So far we have more or less established that the practicality requirement is a much better suited formulation of internalism than what the strong formulation can provide. In the first chapter we established that Speaker Relativism falls under the label Indexical Contextualism, and along with that sort of relativity to moral judgements. Let's use a simple example to illustrate how Dreier imagines this working out, recognizing that the strong formulation of internalism is "too strong", he proposes something he calls *modest internalism*<sup>35</sup>:

(MI): When an agent A judges that it is right to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, she will under normal conditions be motivated to  $\Phi$ .

In short, there is a necessary connection between A's judgement that  $\Phi$ -ing is wrong, and A's motivation to act accordingly<sup>36</sup>. But in reality it's not that simple to state such a rule. The biggest problem with Dreier's reformulation is that it hinges on a state of 'normality':

"How then shall we explain what is it to count as abnormal? One way would be to try to list the psychic states, social contexts, and so on that defeat normality. [...] But the the skeptic will suspect that we are packing and ethically loaded conception of normality into the definition or moral terms, [...]. The "brute list" method looks too post hoc; it looks like we are ruling out as abnormal precisely the situations in which a person is not motivated to do what he or she believes to be the right thing. [...] If so, then internalism tells us nothing deep about moral terms in particular."<sup>37</sup>

Dreier wants us to overcome problems of 'weakness of the will' when we state internalism. Such cases as mentioned before with depression etc. Michael Stocker in his article "Desiring the Bad" (1979) imagined a series of cases where psychological or social states makes an

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<sup>35</sup> Dreier 1990 p.p 14

<sup>36</sup> To clarify any confusion, right is often viewed as not-wrong, as wrong often is spelled out as not-right. There is an asymmetry between right and wrong which must be spelled out this way to avoid absurd cases.

<sup>37</sup> Dreier 1990 p.p 12

agent unable to act accordingly to their beliefs. One of his examples was a politician who in his youth devoted much time to argue for helping the poor and those in need, but in his age lost his will to do so because of “Lack of [the desire to do what one believes to be good] is commonplace. Through spiritual or physical tiredness, through accidie, through...despair,...one may feel less and less motivated to seek what is good”<sup>38</sup>. I will from now on refer to such situations as ‘weakness of the will’, with respects to the thoughts Michael Stocker posited in this article.

It is problematic however, that Dreier uses the terms ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. He admits that he has no clear cut explanation of why an agents situation is to be considered normal.<sup>39</sup> The result of this is that we are to make sense of an agents inability to be motivated based on some statistical matter of what’s normal. This seems intuitively unsatisfying, but the post above illustrates the difficulties which arises when trying to formulate internalism in such a way that it gives us insight into morality. We know that too strong formulations like (SI) does not work, as mentioned in 2.1 it cannot account for cases where ‘weakness of the will’ severs the connection between having a belief that something is morally so-and-so and the motivation to act accordingly, and now it becomes more evident that Dreier’s *modest internalism* is too vague.

Let me illustrate with a fairly commonplace, non-moral example: I believe it’s good for me personally and socially to get out of bed in the morning, and go to school. But I am having trouble finding the motivation to do so. Now, there could be a number of reasons of why I’m not actually pursuing what I so clearly understand as good for me, such as I might be depressed and this is a bad day for me, I might feel that the soft warmth of my covers is too strong of an persuasion to stay in bed, or I might just simply have not had enough sleep that night. In the case of depression it is easy to see how such a state would deprive me of the motivation to act upon what I believe to be good, but in the other cases we are just talking about ‘weakness of the will’. There are many different types of explanations as of why my beliefs (or judgements) have motivated me, but some other factor has hindered me in acting on it.

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<sup>38</sup> Dreier 1990 p.p 11

<sup>39</sup> Dreier 1990 p.p 14

It should be clear so far that I view the (PR) to be a better formulation than Dreier's *modest internalism*. The (PR) specifies better the need for a clause that points out cases where the 'weakness of the will' cuts the connection between belief and motivation. Never the less, Dreier's claim is that *his* Speaker Relativism will account for *this* form of internalism. And I believe that quite successfully he does show that. Take the example:

(1) Elizabeth judges that "racism is wrong."

Elizabeth's moral judgment contains the belief 'racism is wrong', this will reflect her moral framework. Modest internalism then claims that since Elizabeth holds the belief that 'racism is wrong', Elizabeth will be motivated to act accordingly-- under normal conditions. We could perhaps even make the claim that Elizabeth does not have to publicly announce the belief from (1). So, all of the time under normal conditions, Elizabeth will not be say or do racist things. The belief from (1) is part of her moral framework, and her moral framework is part of her *normal condition* since the beliefs that make up her moral framework will have an intrinsic link to being motivated by them.

"[...], speaker relativism can allow that what a person's moral system is may depend on factors extrinsic to that person. In central cases, the ones that have to be in the background to provide a standard of normality, an agent is motivated by what her moral system prescribes."  
(Dreier 1990, p.p 21)

Now we have some insight into how Dreier imagines this theory to be able to account for internalism. Even though as I have mentioned, I do not think *modest internalism* to be a perfect contender to account for internalism. The connection between speaker relativism and the need for internalism seems clearer. But, as we have seen in the first chapter, moral relativism is most interesting when we have cases of disagreement-- which we will examine closer with respects to some of Michael Smith's thoughts in the next section.

## 2.3 Following up on Indexical Contextualism

Michael Smith in his 1995 article “Internalism’s Wheel” sets out to examine some internalist moral theories, and argue what sort of difficulties they face. His claim is that most of them has little or nothing in common other than drawing on internalism to extend their reach from judgement to action. After examining Dreier’s Speaker Relativism, and agreeing with me that his *modest internalism* is too vague, the wheel turns to Gilbert Harman’s theory. In this section we will examine the motivational features of Harman’s theory. But, before we delve deeper into the world of Harman, let me repeat what I consider to be one of Harman’s core aspects from section 1.2:

“We make inner judgements about a person only if we suppose that he is capable of being motivated by the relevant moral considerations.”<sup>40</sup>

Harman’s theory is closely related to Dreier’s, as mentioned by virtue of being contextually based. But he has a different approach to motivation, which also plays a big role in his theory. I will go through how Harman’s theory is internalistic before considering whether or not it passes Smith’s test of *justified coercion*. Harman expresses his thesis like this: “Ought (A, D, C, M)”. Roughly explained Harman considers the indexical “ought” to revolve around an agent A, and action D, consideration C and motivating attitudes M<sup>41</sup>. So when an agent A has the right motivational attitudes, given a consideration C the right course of action would be D. This is what Harman explicates from the quote above. Harman goes on to explain that

“[...] the attitudes M derive from an agreement. That is, they are intentions to adhere to a particular agreement on the understanding that others also intend to do so.” (Harman 1975, p.p 12)

The wording here is a bit unfortunate, and Harman’s use of the word ‘intentions’ is puzzling. It seems to be an informal and mutual understanding between a speaker who utters the judgement, about an agent who the speaker believes will conform to his moral framework

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<sup>40</sup> Harman 1975 p.p 4

<sup>41</sup> Harman 1975 p.p 10

and be motivated by said judgement.<sup>42</sup> Harman's theory is thusly very much like Dreier's, and especially since they both place the speaker as the authority of what is true or not.

(2) Elizabeth claims that it is wrong of Otto to make racist remarks.

In this case, to be explicit, Elizabeth the speaker makes a judgement and gives Otto a consideration (the inner judgement), which she believes Otto would agree to-- which will motivate Otto not to make racist remarks. In this sense, the motivational force is embedded into moral judgements-- and in the case of inner judgements they would have to be shared in some form for them make sense. So, what Harman seems to imagine is a speaker, and an agent who both actively takes part in the social structure of society. And so the speaker is able to make 'inner judgements' about an agent in such a way that the agent will agree. As my initial quotation of Harman in this section suggests, the agent will then be motivated by the speaker-- because they share a belief. A more schematic explanation of this would be:

The speaker (A) says to the agent (B) that '(B) ought not to  $\Phi$ ' (an inner judgment), if B is motivated not to  $\Phi$ , then the 'inner judgement' uttered by (A) is true (or successful). If (A) says to (B) that he ought to  $\Phi$ , and (A) fails to motivate this in (B), then the 'inner judgment' is false (it has failed). Whether or not an 'inner judgment' then fails or succeeds depends on whether or not (A) and (B) can come to be motivated by what their respective moral frameworks elicits, if they converge on the same belief, they will both be motivated and the 'inner judgement' succeeds.

Michael Smith in "The Internalism's Wheel" finds Harman's use of the word "intention" in this just as puzzling, and proposes a different way of spelling it out to account for the way Harman's theory is internalistic, in other words. Smith argues a different formulation of the connection between having a belief and having motivation based on Harman's theory:

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<sup>42</sup> Harman admits to not being able to specify proper how to phrase this. He insists on using the word 'intention' in a broader sense to cover "certain dispositions and habits" (Harman 1975, p.p 12). I believe he imagines people to familiarize themselves with common intentions in their society, or in other words-- getting to know common features of a group of peoples moral framework in order to be able to give inner judgements, but as Harman points out this is merely an hypothesis he will not be able to prove.

“If an agent believes that she would have a pro-attitude towards  $\Phi$ -ing in C if she had a maximally coherent and rational set of pro-attitudes then she does indeed seem practically irrational if she doesn’t actually have a pro-attitude towards  $\Phi$ -ing in C.” (Smith 1995 p.p 290)

For practical reasons I shall from now on refer to this account of internalism as *coherence internalism*. The ‘pro-attitude’ and ‘con-attitude’ should be understood as having a *pro* or *con* attitude towards something, in the same sense as explained in section 2.1. If having an ‘attitude towards  $\Phi$ -ing’ is the same as being “motivated to  $\Phi$ ”, then, having a belief that “ $\Phi$ -ing is morally right” is the same as having an “attitude towards  $\Phi$ -ing”. This comparison might be unfortunate. It is usually widely held that having a belief constitutes a cognitivist feature, while having an attitude is a non-cognitivist feature. If we are not to overlook the distinction between cognitivism and non-cognitivism it would seem like Smith interprets Harman’s theory as a sort of ‘hybrid-theory’. *Prima facie*, I do not see any obvious difficulties with this approach, and in the next section we will see one of its strengths.

Compared to the other accounts of internalism this one includes ‘maximally coherent and rational set of pro-attitudes’. In essence, what it means is that due to external aspects of practical moral discourse, a speaker and an agent would want there to be a *maximally* coherent and rational set of pro-attitudes. As in the example (2) above, Elizabeth’s potential motivation to act according to her beliefs depends on a coherence between her beliefs and her motivational attitudes, as well as her belief that Otto would share this belief, and her motivational attitudes towards what she is proposing to him. The speaker (A) would want agent (B) to agree with her that ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is wrong’. (A) then utters an ‘inner judgment’ which is intended to motivate (B) to agree that ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is wrong’. (A) wants (B) to accept this, because (A) has her own reasons to believing that ‘ $\Phi$ -ing is wrong’, and must believe that this would also be the right thing for (B) to accept.<sup>43</sup>

In a way then, since there is such a necessary connection between beliefs (judgements) and motivation, we can just as well view the essence of making an ‘inner judgement’ as an attempt to motivate someone into doing what one self believes to be the right thing to do. When

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<sup>43</sup> This line of reasoning follows from the ‘argument of (perspectival) immersion’ from section 1.5.

viewed from afar, Harman's theory seems unlikely at times, especially since 'inner judgements' hinges on two people agreeing for the judgement to succeed. In practice, I think Harman wants us to imagine the speaker attempting to make a motivating gesture, not necessarily that the speaker always expects it. In cases where there is obvious disagreement between the speaker and the agent, the 'inner judgement' would simply fail. So let's imagine a case where the speaker's inner judgement obviously fails:

(3) It is wrong of D (A neo-nazi) to shout racist remarks at people.

So again let's picture Elizabeth making this judgement, and at this point it should seem obvious what the result is, but spelling it out is not always the wrong thing to do, the neo-nazi is more than likely not to respond to Elizabeth's 'inner judgement' (even though this example does not involve the standard 'inner judgement' of the form "A *ought* not to D", the *ought* in this sense is implied as *ought-not* when Elizabeth is making the judgement that a certain action is wrong.), or argue against it. In other words, Elizabeth has failed to motivate the neo-nazi, because they do not share the necessary beliefs for that to be possible by 'inner judgements' alone. Harman suggests that such cases can be solved by using the language differently, but we'll come back to that in the third chapter when we look at quasi-absolutism.

It would seem like we have enough insight about Harman's theory now to try and make sense of Smith's argument of *justified coercion*. What this argument is really about, is whether or not a theory has the ability to make the distinction between *justified* and *unjustified coercion*.

## 2.4 Justified Coercion

In his paper 'Internalism's Wheel' (1995) Michael Smith claims that in order to be consistent, internalist theories need to be able to account for three different criteria: First, (1) To be able to account for moral judgments are beliefs, second, (2) it must be able to explain the connection between having said belief and being motivated to act accordingly, and lastly (3) account for the distinction between justified and unjustified use of coercion. Both Harman and Dreier's theories can account for (1) and (2), but the trouble begins when we start putting them to the third test.

For a moral theory to be able to make the distinction between justified and unjustified coercion, might be the biggest problem for a relativist moral theory to tackle. It is closely related to the ‘Argument from (Perspectival) Immersion’ from section 1.5, as it also is a critique of what the concept of ‘flawless disagreement’ extends to. To quickly recap, it’s pretty easy to explain and understand moral relativism from a *bird’s perspective*: two different people have different opinions on a moral question, because they belong to different moral frameworks. But as soon as we immerse ourselves as one of the participants of a discussion, it becomes pretty clear to us why it is unacceptable that the other person is disagreeing with us. With that in mind, Harman’s theory makes a lot of sense, why my judgement is unable to motivate someone who disagrees with my beliefs is only natural.

Smith’s argument from *justified* and *unjustified coercion* paints a picture which illustrates this issue very well:

“Imagine a conversation between two people, A and B. B says to A ‘you morally ought to  $\Phi$  in C’, and A replies ‘It is not the case that I morally ought to  $\Phi$  in C. Let’s suppose further that this conversation takes place in a context where B is in a position to coerce A, and that B says, by way of justifying his use of coercive power, ‘I morally ought to force you to  $\Phi$  in C’. A denies this, saying ‘You morally ought not to force me to  $\Phi$  in C’. (Smith 1995, p.p 285)

The question at hand is simply, if a moral theory can distinguish whenever B is justified in his coercing of A, and when he is not. To help making out the importance of this distinction let’s look at a couple of examples. To expand on (2) above, when Elizabeth is making the judgment that ‘Otto ought not make racist remarks’, and let’s for the sake of argument imagine that Elizabeth is in the position to coerce Otto into not making racist remarks. According to Harman’s theory, then Elizabeth would be justified in her coercion of Otto, if her inner judgement was successful. Since in Harman’s theory, both Elizabeth and Otto would be motivated by a successful inner judgement. But as always, with moral relativism it gets more interesting when we look at disagreement.



I'll mention at first, Smith's own example-- simply because it think it pretty neatly illustrates his point, and the importance of this aspect of a moral theory<sup>44</sup>. Imagine that B is a mugger, who is holding up A at gunpoint. B the exclaims to A "You should give me your wallet", and given the circumstances, A would most likely reluctantly give up his wallet to B. This example can be schematically paraphrased as the quote in the beginning of this section. The point of the matter is, even if B manages to motivate A to give in to his demands-- an inner judgement would not have been successful in this case. This is an unjustified case of coercion. The former example however, shows that when Elizabeth coerces Otto into not making racist remarks, since the inner judgement is successful-- Otto is more or less being forced to act according to his own will. This could have been a good example of someone being persuaded into changing their beliefs, and thusly their motivations. I will get back to looking at Harman's theory in the third chapter, where I discuss the matters of deep disagreement-- and a possible solution to the problem.

It should then, be quite evident that Harman's theory can account for the distinction between unjustified and justified coercion. But how does Dreier's theory fare when faced with this problem? Recall that Dreier's speaker relativism depends on a weaker form of internalism to be consistent. In Dreier's case, we face the cold hard truth, that since his theory only bases it's being true on whether or not an agents moral judgements is consistent with his or her's moral system, the mugger and his victim is in sort of a stand off. When the mugger says to the victim that he should give him his wallet, the mugger is saying (M) "According to my moral system, you should give me your wallet in this situation". For sake of argument, let's then assume that the victim would not be inclined to agree with such a statement, (V) "According to my moral system, I should not give you my wallet in this situation." Their statements are merely incompatible with each other, even without adding a clause about coercion. Let's paraphrase: (M): "According to my moral system, I ought to force you to give me your wallet" & (V): "According to my moral system, you ought not to force me to give me your wallet". What we're dealing with here is problematic, and merely a difference in will. To spell this out properly we need to consider the more schematic version:

(M): According to moral system M, I ought to force you to  $\Phi$  in C.

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<sup>44</sup> Smith 1995 p.p 185

(V): According to moral system  $M^*$ , you ought not to force me to  $\Phi$  in C.

Dreier's theory is unable to spell out the distinction between justified and unjustified coercion. This is what we have to deal with because we are forced to take the moral systems in question into the equation when we are making our point. It hinges not on the people involved, and their respective moral judgements, but rather on claims about their moral systems. This is an example of 'distortion of topic'. I have to be honest though, and indeed be a bit charitable towards Dreier. I am not sure how much further than actually illustrating how moral beliefs are relative to some parameter, and how we are motivated by beliefs, Dreier actually intended to show with *speaker relativism* in the article at hand. What it extends to is unfortunately that it is not able to account for when a case of 'forced motivation' is justified or unjustified. We will get back to some possible solutions to the *justified coercion problem* in the third chapter, when I will look at whether Harman's quasi-absolutism is able to account for cases of *deep* disagreement.

## 2.5 Motivation and Content Preservation?

The main difference between the Traditional Contextualist theories like Harman's and Dreier's is as we saw in the first chapter, that Kölbel's radical relativism and MacFarlanes Non-indexical Contextualism is based on *content preservation*. On the face of it, it would seem that relativist theories which bases beliefs on content preservation would fit very well in with internalism. In section 1.4 we looked at two propositions:

A<sup>1</sup>: "Abortion is wrong"

B<sup>1</sup>: "Abortion is not-wrong"

In other words,  $p$  and  $\sim p$ . How then are we to account for the motivation which should follow in some sense by making such a judgement? So far we have gone through the strong internalism account (SI), the practicality requirement (PR), *modest internalism* (as a consequence of speaker relativism), and what I labeled *coherence internalism* based on Smith's interpretation of Harman's moral relativism. As we can see the latter two formulations are derivations of (PR), and we have established that Harman's theory-- and the

coherence internalism is by far the most successful of the two. It now depends if genuine relativism, which clings so hard to the principle of flawless disagreement, can account for internalism in the same way that Harman's theory can and overcome Smith's third criteria.

It seems intuitive that such a theory must depend on internalism to function, and especially in the fact that it follows the content through time and disagreement with the intention to keep it preserved. Both Kölbel and MacFarlanes theories places the relativity of whether or not a judgement is true on some *perspective* or *parameter* outside of the actual proposition. So, let's then imagine an agent A, who judges that it is wrong to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C. Given the practicality requirement then, A would be motivated to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, or she would be practically irrational. We could perhaps explain motivation in the case of genuine relativism, since it never hinges on making a reference to a certain parameter (such like Dreier's speaker relativism does), that a proposition is simply stating the *reason* for why we are motivated to act in certain circumstances. Consider Rationalism:

(RI) "If it is right for agents to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, then there is a reason for those agents to  $\Phi$  in C" (Smith 1994, p.p 62)

Now, this form of internalism entails the (PR), in as a rational being would act according to however she believes it to be right, or she would be irrational. In the case of a person who gives to charity, we would view it as a person who believes it is right to give to charity (the opposite would be absurd).

(4) "It is right to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C"

(5) "Kristina believes that it is right to give to charity when she can afford it"

Since (4) can be written as  $p$ , and (5) can be written as "Kristina  $p$ ", Rationalism would be an explanation as why for example Kristina has certain beliefs-- and why she has reasons to give to charity, when she feels she can afford it. From what we have learned so far is that we want an account of internalism in the same fashion as Harman's theory gives, which can account for the distinction between justified and unjustified coercion. By virtue of not giving reference to moral frameworks, and normality Harman's theory does just that. From what we

have learned from genuine relativism, there should not be any problem by using the same type of model for moral motivation with the genuinists as Harman's. But their grip around flawless disagreement could be a problem. So, what we are faced with here is actually the question of whether propositions can retain their content in different contexts, while still being able to motivate in the same matter as Harman's *coherence internalism* can. If *content preservation* relativists like Kölbel and MacFarlane can account for motivation in the same sense as Harman can, and overcome the *coercion problem*, then we may have found a way around the (perspectival) immersion argument for the genuinists.

The rationalist formulation (RI) entails the (PR), acting on the basis of having reasons must be considered to be the rational road. The simple  $p$  and  $\sim p$  schematic of how the genuinists seems to view the propositional content of moral judgements, should be accompanied by reasons for why they are there in the first place. This also follows from the argument of (perspectival) immersion. What we are looking for then, is whether or not the genuinist approach to moral relativism can account for people being motivated by simply having a reason to<sup>45</sup>. And that reason is as simple as having a belief. One possibility to redeem the genuinists from the problems arising from the argument of (perspectival) immersion is to constrict the concept of flawless disagreement. These are the claims we shall try to unravel in the third and concluding chapter.

## 2.6 Alternate Option: Externalism?

Externalist theories holds that motivation to act accordingly to one's moral judgements are *not* something intrinsically linked, but rather *psychosocial* reasons. In other words, they believe that the reason we act according to moral beliefs are because we want to fit into society. They then throw away the metaphysical necessity between belief and motivation-- and argue that they can account for motivation just as well as internalist theories does. A classic example which tries to topple the internalist house of cards by denying this connection, is the *amoralists*. David Brink (1986, p.p 30 'Externalist Moral Reasons) wants us to imagine a group of people who recognizes what the *right thing to do* is. They are

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<sup>45</sup> By genuinist approach I mean to maintain the content, independent of context-- and let another type of parameter determine the relativity.

however never motivated to act in such a way, they presumably agree with social standards which they recognize-- yet do the opposite. The formulations of internalism we have looked at so far, cannot account for such cases.

There have been attempts to disprove this idea of amoralists, asserting that if there are no substantive truth to this claim, then the conceptual claim can be maintained. But the most successful argument against the amoralist is perhaps somewhere along the lines of what Smith proposes in *The Moral Problem*<sup>46</sup>. Smith wants us to imagine a blind person who has all the relevant information and data of what colour is. That is that the colour red is when light is reflected in such and such a way, the object which is reflected from will appear as red. Now, even though in this crude form we can say that it is a reasonably good explanation of the colour red. But we can not immerse ourselves in the same experience as of actually seeing something as red, and that understanding of seeing for instance a red apple. In the same way, Smith argues that the amoralists can account for what 'good' is, but in the same way they do not have the actual understanding of what 'good' is as someone who truly understands that *character*<sup>47</sup>.

This fits under a wing of argumentation Smith has called 'moral fetishism'. crudely speaking Smith argues that internalism because of its intrinsic connection between moral judgements and motivation will not suffer under the problem of people who 'act morally just because it's morally good'. In some way we can say that internalism then will guarantee that people are sincere, when they truly believe something is right.

Motivational Externalist Nick Zangwill proposes a *Moral Content Externalism* as an alternative approach to moral motivation, and asks us to abolish the traditional 'cognitivist vs non-cognitivist' distinction. A rather fresh breath in the discussion between externalism and internalism as the traditional argumentation has revolved around disproving one another instead of forcing out improvements on either side.

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<sup>46</sup> Smith 1994 p.p ??

<sup>47</sup> I use the expression 'character' here in relation to the explanation I give when I initially introduced James Dreier in section 1.3.

“We do better to frame the issue in terms of the ‘representational content’ of propositional attitudes of *all* sorts-- whether cognitive or non-cognitive. The issue, so characterized, is whether or not we have propositional attitudes, *the contents of which represents mind-independent moral states of affairs*. [...] There is no reason why someone who thinks that our moral *judgements* are cognitive with realistic moral content should not allow that we also have *non-cognitive* states with realistic moral content-- consider guilt, remorse and the feeling of moral horror.” (Zangwill 2003, p.p 144)

The kind of externalism Zangwill proposes (MCE) promotes two main feats: (1) to be able to distinguish between moral and non-moral content, and (2) that moral beliefs must be accompanied by moral desires.[insert footnote 'Zangwill 2003, p.p 147'] The kind of problem explored earlier, about moral fetishism should then be answered by such a theory. Let's try to imagine a case where this constraint is illustrated:

(5) Kristina believes it to be right to give to charity when she can afford it.

This example involves a conditional, it involves a moral belief 'that it is right to give to charity', and that she should act upon that belief when the agent's economy allows for it. The latter is not a moral belief, what the MCE claims it can account for is the difference between the two, and that if Kristina has a matching moral desire to act on her moral belief she then will give to charity. The question at hand, which the internalists does not need to worry about is 'where does this moral desire' come from? Is it from the realm of what is viewed 'duty', or the realm of 'virtue'? We can easily imagine a person who gives to charity because they believe it is their duty, or that a person who acts on the basis of what she believes the 'virtuous person' would have done. In light of the fact that we're in this paper trying to account for moral motivation in relativist theories, the jump from having to base our moral desires on anything else but the fact that if we have a belief that something 'is morally right to do', to what externalism always seems to have to explain away 'is morally right to do, because...' seems like an easy job for Occam's Razor to me.

Never the less, as opposed to what internalism can offer, illustrating what externalism is does paint a broader picture of why internalism is the right way to go when we want to account for

how moral motivation works for relativist theories. The intrinsic link between moral motivation and moral beliefs will also account quite easily for when someone changes their beliefs. It is only natural then that the motivation will also change. A strong willed person, and by strong willed I only mean that a person who will uphold their motivation matching their belief.

We can of course ask ourselves the question of, what this conceptual connection between having a belief, and being motivated to act accordingly, actually consists of. Why is it that when I judge that 'making racist remarks is wrong', and me watching my language as of not to come off as racist, that tether these two events? An externalist answer would of course be, *social* reasons, some form of *institution* etc. *Prima facie* it would seem like both social and institutional reasons hinge on changing both the belief and the motivation. Externalism abolishes the connection between belief and motivation, and one way of seeing what determines our motivation is that social and institutional reasons also must determine our beliefs. It does not seem plausible to be motivated to  $\Phi$ , but believe that  $\sim\Phi$  is the right thing to do. That would be evidence of a very confused person, one which we would label as irrational. This is why it is been argued that one of the strongest feats of internalism is that it allows for us to very easily account for what happens to motivation when we change our beliefs.

The premise that 'when we are motivated to  $\Phi$ , we also hold the belief that  $\Phi$ -ing is the right thing to do', is something both internalists and externalists should accept. As we just saw above, it seems very implausible that one can hold the motivation to  $\Phi$ , but believe that  $\Phi$ -ing is wrong. This illustrates that it is only the necessary conceptual connection, which the internalists hinge on to make motivation explainable, the externalists believe that the internalists are wrong about. But we see a possible argument for the internalists when we look at changing our beliefs.<sup>48</sup>

Imagine a teenager who grew up being told that white people are better than black people. When this young man grew up he made racist remarks towards black people, promoting his views which were taught him. Later in life he realizes that there are no race of whom is better

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<sup>48</sup> Smith 1996 p.p 71

than other races, he changes his belief. It stands to right, to assume that he no longer has any motivation to make racist remarks, this would conflict with his belief. The internalist account for this change of heart is simply that when the young man changed his supremacist beliefs, he could not have been motivated to make racist remarks or else he would be irrational. He no longer has any reason to make them, and acts accordingly to his beliefs. On the externalist account it is a bit more complicated. First we need to account for what sort of reasons he had to change his beliefs, plausibly social reasons, and then we need to account for how these reasons also promote his motivation to act accordingly. In virtue ethics it is often viewed as taking the virtuous path to act accordingly to how some ideal person would have acted. In this sense, the belief and motivation to act accordingly are being determined separately as well. And that is not something which is easily accounted for.

This fact that internalism can seemingly account for how motivation changes direction based on people's beliefs, or the 'striking fact' as Michael Smith called it,<sup>49</sup> is a good example to why being able to account for internalism is so important for the relativist theories. Relativist theories must account for there being an infinite number of moral beliefs, a lot which are not compatible with each other, and there must be a corresponding number of moral motivations to each of these beliefs to promote the appropriate actions. Grasping on to the principle of internalism does seem like the right way for relativist theories.

## 2.7 Concluding the Second Chapter

In this chapter we had a look at internalism, and why it is important for moral relativism to be able to account for internalism. We also had a look at the relativist theories we were introduced to in the first chapter, and how they would be able to account for internalism. What we however learned the importance of the argument of (perspectival) immersion (API), which we looked at in the end of section 1.5. Smith's argument of *justified coercion* illustrates the importance of a moral theory to, when we assume that belief and motivations function together, that we are able to immerse ourselves in the situation and it is intuitively reasonable.

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*



What we most importantly should take away from this chapter is that Harman's model neither suffers from the (API), nor Smith's argument of *justified coercion*. What seems to be the key to this success is Smith's interpretation of Harman's internalist theory of motivation. It lets moral judgments express both beliefs on the one hand, and an appropriate attitude meant to act as motivating. A moral judgment then insists that the speaker is motivated to act according to some belief, and that the agent (whom the speaker is addressing) should also act accordingly. In section 3.1 we will address the remaining problem, which has been important to consider throughout the whole paper: the distortion of topic. If Kölbel's proposed solution of a pragmatic interpretation is likely, then Harman's approach to moral relativism seems to be perhaps the best to account for the problem of immersion.

The alternate route is to see whether genuine relativist theories which does not have the problem of distortion of topic in the first place, can account for the problem of immersion by adapting to Harman's idea of *quasi-absolutism*. Then, whether or not they could account for Smith's problem of *justified coercion* (when the main difference between the traditional contextualists and the genuinists is the preservation of content).

## Chapter 3:

# Immersing Ourselves in the Discussion

### 3.1 Looking back, introducing the third chapter

This third chapter is devoted to take a closer look into how we are to solve a rather difficult position for a lot of relativist theories. It is namely that of *Immersion*. Concluding the first chapter we had a taste of the ‘Argument of (Perspectival) Immersion’(API), and we followed up this issue in the second chapter when we had a look at the problem of *coercion*. This section will first of all offer a summary of the previous two chapters to weed out the main lines of argument we will follow up on. Then, as I have mentioned earlier in the text, I will take us through Gilbert Harman’s Quasi-Absolutism<sup>50</sup>, and see if there is something there which can help us overcome the issue of immersion. After looking at this solution to the problem of disagreement, we will have a closer look into the question at hand: Can Harman’s Quasi-Absolutism be compatible with genuine relativism, and will this land us safely with a metaethical theory which makes moral relativism as viable contender to explain morality?

First things first, let’s briefly summarize the first chapter. I began quite early to constrict my own views of moral relativism. I said in the beginning that I don’t want us to view moral relativism as a sort of theory that allows us to be tolerant of everything people do in this world, simply because we can explain why something is morally wrong or right for them. Diversity is a great argument to why we should seek understanding about different moral systems, but as the (API) shows us we can not accept every action just because an agent has a reason for doing them.

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<sup>50</sup> I first mention this notion in the end of section 1.5

The first chapter we had a look at two types of moral relativism, the first one being the *traditional* contextualists and the second one mostly referred to as *genuine* relativism. We established that the main difference between the two was that the traditional contextualists bases their relativity on content made by the context. In other words, the content of an utterance depends on who utters it. For example: When I utter the sentence ‘my cat is big’, what that sentence actually mean depends on the context. My cat is definitely not a big cat compared to other cats of his age, but he is bigger in relation to the size he *was* when he was a kitten. In this line of reasoning, when someone utters a moral judgement, it is always to be viewed in relation to some parameter, which is often referred to as a moral system or framework.

One of the issues with these theories is brought up by the comparison between judgements about morality and judgments about mass. As mentioned in section 1.5, when we are making moral judgements we are implicitly also making reference to a moral framework-- and we want it to be understood as an implicit reference, or else we fall into the trap of ‘distortion of topic’. Harman’s comparison between moral judgements and judgements about mass is probably just meant to illustrate the dependence on a parameter, and Kölbel points out that a pragmatic approach to Harman’s theory would keep us away from distorting the discussion.

We ended the first chapter by having a brief look at disagreement. The main issue of course is immersion. But it follows from worrying about whether or not we could immerse ourselves in a discussion, that the discussion seems real. If we can not account for proper disagreement, as in the cases with ‘distortion of topic’, then it would not amount to much to immerse one’s self in such a discussion. Genuine relativism then seems like a fine way of keeping the disagreement real, but when we move from disagreements about trivial themes like taste to moral issues, it becomes evident with the (API) in mind, that immersion is not that simple in a lot of cases. Either we need to constrict ‘flawless disagreement’, or we need to come up with some clever way of making sure that we as moral agents view moral judgements as objective. Harman might have a solution to the latter proposal.

In the second chapter we started looking at a very important part of morality, that of motivation. In the introduction I mentioned that Smith called it a ‘platitude’ that morality is something practical. It is something that makes us act differently, either by refraining to do certain things or by directly acting upon certain convictions. Internalism seems like the right way to help account for moral relativism. The virtues of internalism, especially that of Smith’s ‘striking fact’-- that we change our motivation to fit our moral convictions, gives a strong argument for internalism as a theory. The second chapter then, tries to have the moral relativist theories from the first chapter, account for internalism.

In the second chapter then I follow up on the problem of immersion by comparing the different theories to Michael Smith’s test (See section 2.4) about justified and unjustified cases of *coercion*. The idea is simple, a moral theory should be able to account for whenever someone is forced to act against their will. After the second chapter we had learned that Harman’s moral relativism can explain the phenomenon we are curious about, Dreier could not-- and I proposed that if we could make genuine relativism compatible with Harman’s motivational theory we could perhaps avoid the problem of immersion all together.

The third chapter, will begin by examining Gilbert Harman’s quasi-absolutism and see if there is something we could learn about moral relativism in general, and the problem of disagreement. What is evident is at least that Harman’s approach to quasi-absolutism tells us that he is well aware of the problem that immersion can pose for such theories. We will then see how well such an approach could be compatible with genuine relativism, before we head out to have a closer look at the ‘pragmatic’ approach to Harman which Kölbel proposes. If we could avoid the trap of ‘distortion of topic’, Harman’s theory would seem a lot stronger.

### **3.1 To avoid the problem of Immersion: Quasi-absolutism**

Concluding the first chapter I added a quote from Harman, which adds a clause about objective truth conditions:

(III): For the purposes of assigning *objective* truth conditions, a judgement of the form *it would be morally wrong of P to D*, has to be understood elliptical for a judgement of the form,

*in relation to moral framework M, it would be morally wrong of P to D. Similarly for other moral judgements. (Harman 1996 p.p. 43)*

The quote above is meant to solve the problem of fundamentally disagreeing parties. I suggested this in the conclusion of section 1.5 as a possible contender to account for the problem raised by the (API), which I will again repeat:

- (1) The Content (p) is at best relatively true (Alethic Relativism)
- (2) If D judges validly that p, it will also be valid for D to judge that *it's true that p*.  
(Truth is Disquotational within a perspective)
- (3) If D judges that *It's true that p* then D must, on pain of incoherence, judge that *It's false that not-p*.
- (4) If D that *It's false that not-p*, then D must, on the pain of incoherence, judge that anyone who judges *not-p* is making a mistake.

Therefore,

- (5) D must judge that N is making a mistake (if N judges that *not-p*) and so cannot regard the disagreement with N as faultless.

Therefore,

- (6) The disagreement between D and N is not faultless.

Harman seems concerned about the consequences from when two people have differentiating opinions on a moral matter, and because of moral relativism it is not as easy as we would like to believe for these people to express their disagreement. Let's use a familiar example:

- (A) believes that 'abortion is morally wrong'
- (B) believes that 'abortion is morally not-wrong'

This distinction is clearly acceptable to most people, even if one has a strong opinion on the matter, it should be fairly easy to accept that (A)'s beliefs are the negation of (B)'s beliefs. Now, from what we have learned from the previous two chapters there are two traps we need to avoid, 'distortion of topic' and 'faultless disagreement'.

if (A) explicitly expresses her belief explicitly like this:

(A<sup>e</sup>) ‘according to my moral framework abortion is morally wrong’

and (B) explicitly expresses her belief in the same way

(B<sup>e</sup>) ‘according to my moral framework abortion is morally not-wrong’

We know from section 1.2 that they are not actually expressing their moral beliefs, but rather saying something about their moral systems. They are simply stating facts, and we want to avoid this way of speaking about their moral beliefs.

On the other hand when we have faultless disagreement of the form:

(A<sup>i</sup>) ‘abortion is morally wrong’

(B<sup>i</sup>) ‘abortion is morally not-wrong’

the (API) shows us that one of these two is wrong as long as we immerse ourselves in the discussion. Harman then seems to suggest that adding a clause in his moral theory, which ensures that whenever we are making moral judgements we are making them *as if they were* objective facts-- such that we as moral agents will treat them convincingly<sup>51</sup>. By ‘treating moral judgements convincingly’ I mean that when someone utters a moral judgement, one will stand behind that conviction uttered and perhaps voice objection towards disagreement with said conviction. If (A) voiced her beliefs on abortion to (B), who clearly disagrees with (A)’s beliefs-- and (B) simply says that (A) is right in her belief, it seems to be something wrong with (B)’s reasoning behind her own beliefs. This is what the (API) illustrates.

Now there seems to be at least two different ways to account for such a fundamental disagreement. First, let’s assume that (A)’s reasons for believing abortions to be morally wrong is religiously based, and that (B)’s reasons for believing abortions to be morally

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<sup>51</sup> The previous definitions of his moral theory are found in section 1.2, one of them being a parallel to judgements about mass.

not-wrong is based upon humanitarian reasons. It stands to reason that when (A) and (B) are discussing their disagreement their argumentation would follow from whatever reasons they have for believing either  $p$  or  $\sim p$ . In a way, their discourse would not go anywhere because of (A) arguments are based upon something entirely different than (B)'s beliefs are based on. A trivial analogy to this would for example two people arguing about the temperature of the bathwater, it would not make sense unless they could agree which parameters for measuring temperature they would use.<sup>52</sup> This could be an example of how explicit use of moral judgements could help the discourse. If (B)'s moral judgement, with reference to her moral framework would help steer the discourse in such a way that they perhaps could resolve their disagreement, or at least make sure that both (A) and (B) gets to express their disagreement properly. If such an event would occur it would be hard to conclude that they are not actually expressing disagreement. Even if both (A) and (B) were to explain their moral judgements with reference to their moral frameworks, we should in this sense be able to account for disagreement.

Now, in the second chapter, when we had a closer look to how James Dreier's speaker internalism would fare with Michael Smith's test of justified use of coercion, we learned that by giving reference to a moral framework to express their moral judgements we can not properly account for unjustified or justified use of coercive power.

Regarding faultless disagreement, I posited in the second chapter, by the end of section 2.5 that we perhaps would have to constrict the concept of *faultless disagreement*. The (API) directly poses a threat to this concept, and unless we can find a mistake in the (API), content preserving relativist theories might end up in the same pitfall as contextualism if they want to keep holding on to faultless disagreement. And here is why:

When I assert the moral judgement  $p$ , I have in a way also asserted that  $\sim p$  is wrong, according to my moral framework. But I have never uttered the latter assertion, it is entailed by the assertion of my initial utterance. When someone else then comes along and asserts  $\sim p$ , and at the same time (even without explicitly uttering it) asserts that  $p$  is wrong, I must be, on

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<sup>52</sup> If one of the involved people talks about the temperature of the bathwater in celsius degrees, while the other uses fahrenheit there would be some confusion.

the pain of incoherence (from the API, line (4)), thinking that this person is making some sort of mistake. How can we reject (4) from the (API), without becoming absolutists?

One solution is that I as a moral agent can acknowledge that I have made no mistake in my judgement that  $p$ , and I can make the assumption that my interlocutor has made no mistake in her judgement that  $\sim p$ . This way we both acknowledge that neither has made any mistake in relation to our respective moral frameworks.<sup>53</sup> This solution may save the concept of faultless disagreement from the (API), but I do not think it to be a salient solution to the problem of disagreement. It would seem like this sort of solution only allows us to confirm that our two moral frameworks are incompatible. In a way, I am agreeing that you have a moral framework, and that you have made a judgement based on that particular framework. I am also allowing your judgement, based on your moral framework, to be right. This is also a kind of *distortion of topic*. To keep the spirit of faultless disagreement alive, we have stopped disagreeing about  $p$ , but we are rather coming to an understanding about the moral frameworks behind  $p$  and  $\sim p$ . To solve the problem which the (API) poses then, faultless disagreement might perhaps seem unattractive overall.

The second way to account for such fundamental disagreement is more leading towards Harman's suggestion to let some sort of quasi-absolutist approach be the explanation for fundamental disagreement. As the above quote in the beginning of the section suggests, treating all moral judgements as if they were objective could help us understand more of a person's attitudes towards a moral issue. In section 2.1 I introduced expressivism as an alternate to moral relativism, which in some ways is related to moral relativism as it allows for different moral judgements to be expressed as attitudes. What is interesting about expressivism, and attitudes is that they encourage motivation. In section 2.3 we saw Michael Smith's interpretation of Harman to involve moral judgements to express both beliefs and attitudes. This ensured moral judgements to have both a side where moral discourse is possible, because of the intrinsic beliefs, but also as a way of ensuring that beliefs followed by the appropriate motivation.

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<sup>53</sup> Boghossian 2011 p.p 66



What then is quasi-absolutism? Harman wants us to consider the use of quasi-absolutist language to solve the problem that arises when two people are fundamentally disagreeing over a subject.<sup>54</sup> In essence, what Harman is suggesting, is that whenever we fundamentally disagree over a subject, we use our language differently to make ourselves understood. What I mean by fundamentally disagreeing is those situations where two speakers have fundamentally different moral frameworks. If they had a similar moral framework, then it would be a lot easier to pick out instances where one of the participants in a discussion was at fault. Fundamentally differing moral frameworks then is somewhat different, because from a bird's perspective both participants are correct.<sup>55</sup>

What Harman suggests is that whenever two people are fundamentally in disagreement, we express our attitudes towards certain standards.

“In perhaps the simplest form of quasi-absolutism, a moral relativist projects his or her moral framework onto the world and then uses moral terminology as if the projected morality were the single true morality, while at the same time admitting that this way of talking is only “as if”. The supposed advantage of this quasi-absolutist usage is that it allows people with different moral frameworks to disagree with each other. (Critics of the proposal might claim that it only allows such people to appear to disagree with each other!)” (Harman 1996 p.p 34)

I believe the initial thought behind adapting the initial definition from section 1.2 to the one mentioned in the beginning in this section was to avoid the problem of distortion of topic. As I have stressed at various points, I find it unlikely that people expresses their moral judgments in the explicit form. It would seem like quasi-absolutism is a maneuver meant to allow for explicit use of moral judgements in cases where the disagreement is fundamental. This way the traditional contextualist could not only avoid the problem of the (API)<sup>56</sup>, account for justified/unjustified coercion and on top of it all account for genuine disagreement-- and avoid the pitfall of distortion of topic.

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<sup>54</sup> Harman & Thomson 1996 p.p 42-43

<sup>55</sup> Being an outside party viewing two people arguing over a moral matter, expressing fundamental disagreement, one should be able to see why both participants of the discussion can be right, according to their respective moral frameworks.

<sup>56</sup> It's worth reminding that traditional contextualism does not hinge on the concept of faultless disagreement, and initially does not suffer as greatly from the arguments the (API) poses.

What Harman seems to suggest is that when we fundamentally differ over moral subjects, we use expressivist language to promote our attitudes towards a certain moral judgement, which we believe to be true. At the same time, quasi-absolutism allows us to express our beliefs explicitly to whomever we are having a disagreement with, to make ourselves understood.

Let's try to imagine such a case: (A) and (B) are overtly disagreeing, both their moral frameworks are consistent,  $p$  asserted by (A) contradicts with (B)'s moral framework:

(A) "Having an abortion is morally wrong"

(B) "Having an abortion is morally acceptable"

(A) and (B) are fundamentally disagreeing, according to Harman they are expressing a belief  $p$  and  $\sim p$ , and from what we know of how these beliefs relate to motivation they also express an attitude.<sup>57</sup> This is a sensible way to let a belief intrinsically be accompanied by a corresponding motivation. Recall from section 2.1 that according to expressivism, having an attitude also constitutes having motivation. It is not far fetched to let a cognitive feature such as *belief*, which according to internalism also constitutes a corresponding motivation, also express a non-cognitive feature like an *attitude*, since the core aspect of having an attitude is being motivated to act accordingly.

(A) can then express (B)'s judgment, while at the same time expressing an attitude repudiating the claim. This way quasi-absolutism, by way of using our language expressivistic, lets us account for fundamental disagreement.

### 3.3 Genuine Disagreement for Genuine Relativists

In the previous section I made the claim that traditional contextualists are better equipped to resist the problem of disagreement, despite the initial concerns about the distortion of topic. Genuine relativism initially does not need to worry about the problem of distortion of topic,

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<sup>57</sup> This is based on Smith's interpretation of how Harman relates his moral theory about judgments, to having moral motivation from section 2.3,

but as we know they motivate their view by clinging to the principle of *faultless disagreement*. Matters of taste when we talk about food is an example of when it is relatively easy to accept that there is faultless disagreement, even as one of the participants of the discussion. It is harder to comply with this principle when we talk about moral issues, as the (API) illustrates. In section 3.1 I outlined by reference to Paul Boghossian's solution to overlook the (API), but concluded that this sort of maneuver would only open up the genuinists to the problem of distortion of topic. The solution then, could be to discard the principle of *faultless disagreement*, and see if they can account for motivation in the same way as Harman. It is the fourth line from the (API) which concerns us, and is not compatible with the principle of faultless disagreement:

- (4) If D judges that *It's false that not-p*, then D must, on the pain of incoherence, judge that anyone who judges *not-p* is making a mistake.

Faultless disagreement claims that even if two people (A) and (B) asserts a proposition *p* and it's negation, neither of them has made a mistake. As far as relativity goes, faultless disagreement is not necessarily a faulty principle. As mentioned matters of taste, or even judgments about mass or simultaneity can easily be described as to account for the principle of faultless disagreement. However, these matters does not need us to immerse ourselves in the discussion to get a complete understanding of what happens. If genuine relativism can account for motivation in the same way as Harman, then not only would they be able to account for the concerns Smith's argument of *justified coercion*, but also avoid the genuine problem the (API) poses.

First of all, let me repeat Michael Smith's interpretation of Harman's motivational theory from the second chapter:

"If an agent believes that she would have a pro-attitude towards  $\Phi$ -ing in C if she had a maximally coherent and rational set of pro-attitudes then she does indeed seem practically irrational if she doesn't actually have a pro-attitude towards  $\Phi$ -ing in C." (Smith 1995 p.p 290)

Genuine relativism also consider moral judgements to express propositions, in the form of beliefs. In the same way that expressivist language allows for relativist features, we can assume that letting a non-cognitive feature to also be expressed by moral judgments. Genuine relativists then should be able to accept that moral judgments can express the cognitivist feature ‘belief’, as well as the non-cognitivist feature ‘attitude’. This motivational approach for genuine relativism should open up the path to the use of quasi-absolutist language.

If genuine relativism can accept that moral judgments asserts beliefs and expresses an attitude, like the Harman’s theory it would be able to account for disagreement and motivation in an intuitively satisfactory way. This way we could have our cake and eat it too. Faultless disagreement only claims that (A) and (B) are correct regarding their own respective moral framework, neither of them has to accept each other's beliefs. Quasi-absolutism can help illustrate that.

Assume that (A) and (B) are disagreeing about the moral judgment “It is wrong of P to D”. According to the principle of faultless disagreement, neither of these are wrong according to their own moral framework. However, the (API) teaches us that (A) should not accept (B)’s judgement on the pain of being incoherent. If, genuine relativism can in the same way as Harman accept that moral judgments expresses, also an attitude, then (A) can utter (B)’s moral judgment and at the same time express an attitude against it. (A) and (B) will accept that they have different moral frameworks, but the use of quasi-absolutist language helps them voice their actual disagreement instead of just the negation of the other’s utterance.

As mentioned, genuine relativism does not suffer from the initial problem of distortion of topic. Can the traditional contextualists overcome this problem? I think they can, and I think both *schools* of moral relativism can account for the problem of disagreement by looking at how they treat moral motivation.

### **3.4 The Pragmatic Approach**

Harman’s indexical contextualism then, was in the beginning the theory discussed here with the most obvious flaw. When we left the first chapter behind I suggested, with reference to

Kölbel, a pragmatic approach to Harman's theory that could help us avoid the problem of distortion of topic. To briefly recap: Distortion of topic is when due to reference to a moral framework, the discussion stops being about moral judgment. For instance, when Otto and Elizabeth are disagreeing about whether abortions are morally acceptable or not. If Otto and Elizabeth utter their moral judgements and we read them as explicit, the topic will be distorted as we have learned from earlier points made in this thesis.<sup>58</sup>

The initial moral judgement is of the form "It is wrong of P to D", the semantic approach to indexical contextualism then, states that when we utter the sentence of the form "It is wrong of P to D" we really mean "According to my moral framework, it is wrong of P to D".<sup>59</sup> We know from the second chapter that according to Harman's model, when we utter a sentence of the form "It is wrong of P to D" we are asserting a belief about the action D, as well as an attitude about D. However, the assertion we are trying to make is not about our moral framework. When Otto says "Abortions are morally wrong", Elizabeth will not be inclined to accept this, because she disagrees. If Otto utters "According to my moral code, abortions are morally wrong", Elizabeth should be able to accept this. Otto is only making a statement about his moral framework, and Elizabeth is not in place to be able to disagree with whether Otto's utterance being in conflict with his moral framework or not.

Elizabeth on the other hand could be in the position to claim that Otto's moral judgment is incompatible with his own moral framework, if she (for example from another discussion or conversation) had gained information about Otto's beliefs. Let's also assume that Otto is honest, and has the possibility to change his views. But the example can happen, where Elizabeth can point out inconsistencies with Otto's utterances. To avoid the distortion of topic issue then, we have to avoid viewing the explicit versions of an utterance being semantically propositionally equivalent with the actual implicit utterances.

"When i utter [abortions are morally wrong] and you utter the negation, then the *propositions* we express respectively are not by themselves incompatible. However, *given* the presupposition conventionally triggered, that our moral codes converge, these propositions are

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<sup>58</sup> I mention this point in sections 1.2, 1.4 and 1.5, and some others. It should not be necessary to restate it at length.

<sup>59</sup> Kölbel 2005 p.p 286

incompatible. This explains the intuition that one cannot accept what the other has expressed without changing one's mind." (Kölbel 2005 p.p 286, brackets added by me)

What Kölbel is claiming here, is that when we deal with implicit utterances we can reject them if we disagree. This also follows from (4) from the (API). If we are dealing with explicit utterances, we can accept them because no claim against our moral framework is made. It's simply stating a fact about *some* moral framework. Kölbel insists that if we presuppose that a moral framework is underlying a moral judgment, we can to our best ability compare our moral frameworks and see whether or not our beliefs are compatible. The problem with distortion of topic seems to be one of immersion as well.

Let me quickly recap my example from section 3.1. Agents (A) and (B) are disagreeing over whether or not "It is morally right of P to D". Let's assume that (A) and (B)'s respective moral frameworks are consistent, and that (A)'s beliefs are religiously based and (B) bases her moral framework on humanitarian beliefs. Their uttering the negation of the others moral judgment will get them nowhere, and if they use their language explicit they are not actually disagreeing at all.<sup>60</sup> What we want to happen is (A) presupposing that (B)'s moral framework is based on humanitarian beliefs, such that (A) can know what (B) means by her utterances. The existence of a moral framework should not be ignored then, but what we want to avoid if we'd like a discussion to stay alive is that we do not treat implicit utterances as *propositionally equivalent* to their explicit versions. Kölbel's more pragmatic approach to this issue is more intuitively satisfying.

When we consider our own moral beliefs, and our own moral utterances I do not think we often speak or think about morality in the explicit sense. I will also assume that most other people will not utter their moral beliefs as explicit utterances with reference to their moral codes, convictions or framework. Intuitively it seems a lot more satisfying, what Kölbel proposes with the pragmatic approach. We can presuppose that the people that are around us are moral agents who have a moral framework, and our communication with them will only help us understand our disagreements and our agreements by actually using the language to

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<sup>60</sup> It is one of those times when it would be acceptable to say "let's agree to disagree".

make ourselves understood. Simple moral judgments like “It is wrong of P to D” and their negations go nowhere unless we try to expand the discussion.

### 3.5 Concluding

This thesis set out to explore a few issues which follow in the wake of moral relativism. I wanted initially to shed light on moral relativism as a valid meta-ethical theory. The fact that this multicultural world we live in differs in so many key aspects should be reason enough to seek an understanding about moral relativism. The problem at hand is that of immersion. It is easy enough for philosophers, academics and theorists to schematically set forth a world in which morality is consistent and coherent. But the problem of immersion is one where we actively have to imagine what the most reasonable thing that a person would say and do.

The first chapter I dedicated to give an introduction to some aspects of moral relativism. We concluded that there are (at least) two types of moral relativism. Traditional contextualism which places the relativity of the content in relation to the context, more so than often this context is a moral framework. On the other hand we have the genuine relativists, sometimes referred to as alethic relativism. This form of relativism places the relativity differently. They regard the truth-value of a moral judgment to be determined by the moral framework, *after*, the context of use is determined. In other words, the content of an utterance stays the same regardless of who and when utters it-- we could say that genuine relativism is that of *content preservation*.

Another thing we learned from the first chapter is the fact that traditional contextualism suffers greatly from a problem called *distortion of topic*. This is what occurs if the approach a sentence such as “It is wrong of P to D” as propositionally equivalent to the explicit form “According to my moral framework, it is wrong of P to D”. This issue is important regarding disagreement. If I in a solo-case utter the explicit form of a moral judgment I am not actually making a moral judgment, but stating a fact about my moral framework. I am entitled to do so, and in some cases this is what I mean to do. However, in the case where I am disagreeing with another person I cannot utter the explicit form. The explicit form will distort the discussion from me disagreeing about a moral matter with another person, to me just stating a

fact about my moral framework. It could even be considered that we do not even understand the extent of our disagreement. The problem of distortion of topic then, is a real one which must be overcome in order to convincingly have moral relativism account for something as trivial as disagreement.

On the other hand, we learned from section 1.5 that genuine relativism, even if steering clear of the problem of distortion of topic, also cannot account for disagreement in a fully satisfactory way. Their problem lies with holding on to the principle of faultless disagreement. In short, it states that two people voicing their beliefs will be correct in their assertions, and neither will have made a mistake (be at fault).<sup>61</sup> By the end of section 1.5, by reference to Mark Richard, we see a compelling argument against the validity of faultless disagreement in practice. In short, the Argument from (Perspectival) Immersion, claims that a person making a moral judgment has their own reasons for believing it in the first place. When another person voices their negation of this moral judgment, we must (on the pain of incoherence, from the fourth line) judge that they are wrong (at fault, or has made a mistake). The (API) is convincing enough to shed some light on the discussion, and I proposed that perhaps Harman's idea of using quasi-absolutist language to account for deep disagreement might be the way for the genuinists to go.

The second chapter I wanted to help paint a broader picture of the discussion by having a look at internalism. If there is such a thing as an intrinsic link between having a belief and being motivated to act accordingly, it seems shallow to treat moral beliefs without taking the motivation into consideration. I begin the second chapter by having a brief look at a theory called expressivism, which greatly differs from the ones discussed in the first chapter by virtue of being non-cognitivist. This simply means that expressivism doesn't consider moral judgments to assert propositions, but rather express attitudes. More importantly, we took note of the fact that it is broadly accepted that having an attitude towards something is considered to be motivated to act accordingly.

I had a look at several internalist theories, and even a brief look at an alternative externalist idea-- but the main concern was one raised by Michael Smith regarding *justified* and

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<sup>61</sup> See sections 1.4 and 3.3



*unjustified use of coercion*<sup>62</sup>. The idea that a moral theory must be able to account for when someone is being forced to act against their will. This too is a way of stating a problem of immersion. By the end of the second chapter it became evident that even though initially faced with overcoming distortion of topic, Harman's traditional contextualism could more easily overcome problems which directly related to that of immersion. Harman's theory doesn't suffer from the (API), and it can account for Smith's concerns about *coercion*. At this point we had also sneaked a peek into if genuine relativism was compatible with this form of motivational account<sup>63</sup>, and we could infer that it too had the potential to account for the three criteria Michael Smith suggests: (1) account for moral judgments as asserting beliefs, (2) account for the relation between having a belief and being motivated to act accordingly, and lastly (3) account for justified and unjustified use of coercion<sup>64</sup>.

In the third and final chapter then, I revisit the idea of quasi-absolutist language as I proposed in the end of section 1.5 to a possible way of letting genuine relativism be able to account for deep/genuine disagreement. Before getting to genuine relativism, I restated and explicated why Harman's theory allows for quasi-absolutism by again having a look at what the motivational account results in. The strongest part of Harman's theory is that it allows us to state our belief, and at the same time express an attitude. This feature helps us keep track of when the use of coercion is justified or unjustified, and it also helps us in the cases where we simply have fundamentally differing moral opinions. By use of quasi-absolutist language in cases where we obviously disagree we can help keeping the discussion alive by stating moral judgements *as if* they were objective truths. This way we can express our disagreement with people whom we fundamentally disagree with, by stating our understanding of their moral framework and at the same time expressing an attitude towards the asserted belief. This account should help the genuine relativists overcome their problems with immersion, because it let's us constrict the principle of faultless disagreement to only function in a bird's perspective. The use of quasi-absolutist language let's us accept the consistency in a person's moral framework, but it also allows us to express our discontent with their beliefs.

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<sup>62</sup> See section 2.3.

<sup>63</sup> I called this coherence internalism in section 2.3.

<sup>64</sup> I elaborate on this in the beginning of section 2.4.

Moral relativism as a metaethical theory does not need to find the means for us to solve our disagreements and moral issues with each other as moral agents. It needs only help us account for what actually happens when we disagree, and it needs to account for this convincingly. If we cannot immerse ourselves as the moral agents described by a theory, which intention is to give an account of how morality works in the real world, then the moral theory we have at hand is faulty. I hope that this thesis can, above anything else, shed some light into the fact that treating morality as relative need not set us on a path where we have to tolerate everything other people say and do, just because we can explain why they say and do the things they do. I do think it's safe to assume that it is not only the people in my personal vicinity who reacts to moral relativism as a intuitively true theory, but they would never accept faultless disagreement if it meant that we had to accept other people's opinions. The (API) helps us illustrate that.

What remains is the distortion of topic, and keeping to the idea that a moral theory should be able to account for moral judgements and disagreement convincingly I believe that the pragmatic approach to Harman's theory must be kept, in order to let quasi-absolutist language be a possibility. If we can allow the constriction of faultless disagreement, and the pragmatic approach to moral judgments-- we have two versions of moral relativity which can help us account for how morality works.

After all, we will never find true agreement on all moral matters.

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